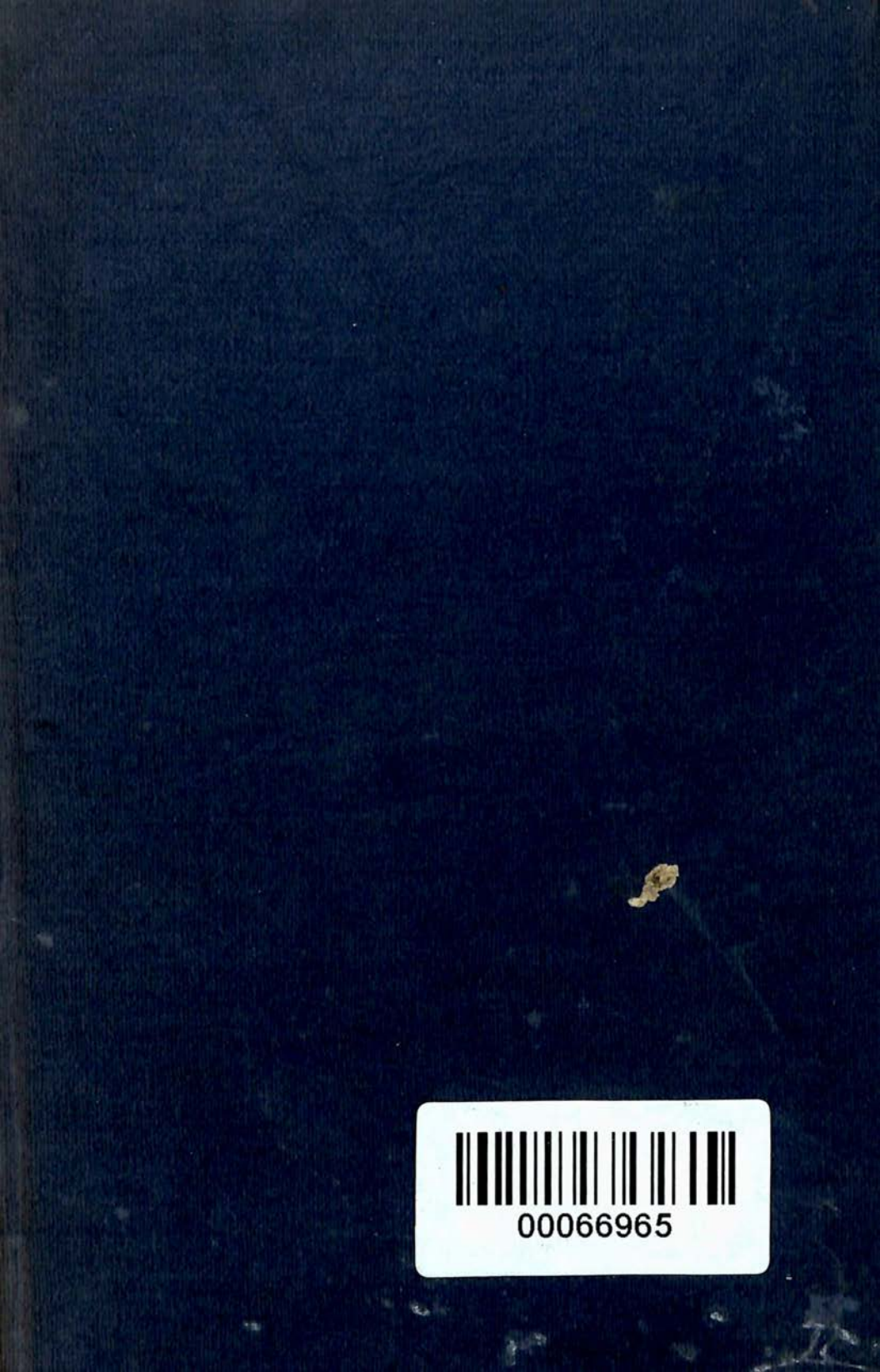
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THE
ASIATIC SOCIETY OF BOMBAY
Town Hall, Bombay.

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VIEW

OF THE PRINCIPAL

DEISTICAL WRITERS.

VOL. I.

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PREFACE.

NO man that is not utterly unacquainted with the ſtate of things among us can be ignorant, that in the laſt, and eſpecially in the preſent age, there have been many books publiſhed, the manifeſt deſign of which was to ſet aſide revealed religion. Never in any country where Chriſtianity is profeſſed, were there ſuch repeated attempts to ſubvert its divine authority, carried on ſometimes under various diſguiſes, and at other times without any diſguiſe at all. The moſt noted writers on that ſide have been at liberty to produce their ſtrongeſt objections; theſe objections have been retailed by others; and many ſeem to take it for granted, that Chriſtianity hath received very ſenſible wounds by the ſeveral attacks that have been made upon it, and that they have greatly hurt its credit, and weakened its authority.

But whoſoever will be at the pains impartially to examine thoſe of the deiſtical writers that have hitherto appeared among us, and to compare them with the anſwers which have been made to them, will find, that upon a nearer view they are far from being ſo formidable as ſome have been apt to apprehend. And ſince there are few that have leiſure or patience for a particular inquiry into the ſeveral writings which have appeared in this controverſy, ſome judicious perſons, who wiſh well to the intereſt of our common Chriſtianity, have been of opinion,

that it might be of real ſervice to give a ſummary view of the moſt noted books that have been publiſhed againſt revealed religion for above a century paſt, together with proper obſervations upon them. From ſuch a view, the reader might be enabled to form ſome notion of the ſeveral turns this controverſy hath taken, how often the enemies of revealed religion have thought proper to change their methods of attack, the different diſguiſes and appearances they have put on, and the ſeveral ſchemes they have formed, all directed to one main end, viz. to ſet aſide revelation, and to ſubſtitute mere natural religion, or, which ſeems to have been the intention of ſome of them, no religion at all, in its room.

Upon ſuch a compariſon between thoſe that have attacked Chriſtianity, and thoſe that have written in defence of it, it would appear, that if it be really true, that deiſm and infidelity have made a great progreſs among us, it muſt have been owing to ſomething elſe than the force of reaſon and argument; that the Chriſtian religion is in no danger from a free and impartial inquiry; and that the moſt plauſible objections which have been brought againſt it, though advanced with great confidence, and frequently repeated, have been fairly and ſolidly confuted. Such a view would make it manifeſt, that the enemies of Chriſtianity have not generally behaved as became fair adverſaries, but have rather acted as if they judged any arts lawful by which they thought they might gain their cauſe. And yet notwithſtanding their utmoſt efforts for above a century paſt, they have really been able to ſay but little againſt the Chriſtian religion, conſidered in its original

original purity, as delivered by Chriſt and his apoſtles, or to invalidate the ſolid evidences by which it is atteſted and confirmed.

For theſe reaſons it hath been judged, that a ſhort and comprehenſive view of the deiſtical writers of the laſt and preſent age might be of great uſe. And as the courſe of my ſtudies hath led me to be converſant in ſeveral of thoſe writings which have been publiſhed on both ſides in this important controverſy, it was urged upon me, by ſome perſons for whom I have a great regard, to undertake this work. There was one great objection, which hindered me for ſome time from attempting it, and which ſtill appeareth to me to be of no ſmall weight, and that is, that as, according to the plan that was formed, it would be neceſſary to give an account of the anſwers publiſhed to the books I ſhould have occaſion to mention, this would oblige me to take notice of ſome of my own. I am ſenſible how difficult it is for an author to ſpeak of his own performances, in ſuch a manner as not to intrench upon the rules of decency. If he give a favourable character of them, this will be interpreted as a proof of his vanity, any appearance of which is uſually turned to his diſadvantage. And on the other hand, if he ſhould make no mention of his own books at all, where the nature of the deſign in which he is engaged makes it proper for him to mention them, this might perhaps be cenſured as a falſe and affected modeſty. It is no eaſy matter to keep clear of theſe extremes; and, for this reaſon, it would have been a particular pleaſure to me to have ſeen this work undertaken by another hand; but as this hath not been

done, I have choſen rather to attempt it myſelf, than that a work, which I cannot but think might be of real ſervice, ſhould be neglected. It cannot be expected, that a diſtinct notice ſhould be taken of all the writers that have appeared among us againſt revealed religion for this century paſt. This, if it could be executed, would take too large a compaſs, and be of no great uſe. A view of the principal of them, or, at leaſt, of thoſe who have made the greateſt noiſe, may be ſufficient. And the deſign is not to give an hiſtorical account of the authors, or of their perſonal characters, but to give ſome idea of their writings, which alone we have properly to do with.

The method propoſed, and for the moſt part purſued, is this: The ſeveral writers are mentioned in the order of time in which they appeared. Some account is given of their writings, and of the ſeveral ſchemes they have advanced, as far as the cauſe of revelation is concerned. And great care has been taken to make a fair repreſentation of them, according to the beſt judgment I could form of their deſign. Some obſervations are added, which may help to lead the reader into a juſt notion of thoſe writings, and to detect and obviate the ill tendency of them. There is alſo an account ſubjoined of the anſwers that were publiſhed; not all of them, but ſome of the moſt remarkable, or ſuch as have come under the author's ſpecial notice. And very probably ſome have been omitted, which might well deſerve to be particularly mentioned.

This may ſuffice to give a general idea of the following work; at the end of which there are ſome reflections ſubjoined, which ſeem naturally to ariſe upon ſuch a view as

is here given. Obſervations are made on the conduct of the deiſts in the management of the argument. And the whole concludes with a brief repreſentation of the evidences for the Chriſtian religion, and its excellent nature and tendency.

What has been now laid before the reader, is taken from the Preface to the firſt edition: and it gives a juſt account of the original nature and deſign of this work, which was at firſt intended only to make up one volume. But not long after the publication of it, I was put in mind of a conſiderable omiſſion I had been guilty of, in making no mention of Mr. Hume, who was looked upon to be one of the moſt ſubtile writers that had of late appeared againſt Chriſtianity. About the ſame time was publiſhed, a pompous edition of the works of the late Lord Viſcount Bolingbroke, in five volumes quarto, the three laſt of which ſeemed to be principally intended againſt revealed, and even againſt ſome important principles of what is uſually called natural religion. Some perſons, for whoſe judgment and friendſhip I have a great regard, were of opinion, that, to complete the deſign which was propoſed in publiſhing the *View of the Deiſtical Writers*, it was neceſſary to take a diſtinct notice of the writings of Mr. Hume and Lord Bolingbroke: and that in that caſe it might be of uſe to make more large and particular obſervations upon them, than could properly be done where a number of writers came under conſideration. This produced a ſecond volume, which, though it had the ſame title with the former, viz. *A View of the Deiſtical Writers*, yet differed from it in this, that it did not contain ſtrictures and obſervations upon a

variety

variety of authors, but a large and particular conſideration of the only two there examined, viz. Mr. Hume and the late Lord Bolingbroke, eſpecially the latter. And this was judged neceſſary, conſidering his Lordſhip's high reputation as a writer, and that there are ſcarce any of the objections againſt Chriſtianity which he hath not repeated and urged in one part or other of his works, and that with a peculiar confidence, and with all the ſtrength of reaſon and vivacity of imagination he was maſter of. And as I then thought I had finiſhed the deſign, that volume ended with an *Addreſs to Deiſts and profeſſed Chriſtians*, which appeared to me to be a proper concluſion of the whole.

But after the ſecond volume was publiſhed, ſome letters were ſent me, relating both to that and the former volume, which put me upon reconſidering ſome things in them, and making farther additions and illuſtrations, which I thought might be of advantage to the main deſign. Theſe were thrown into a *Supplement*, which made up a third volume, and was publiſhed ſeparately for the uſe of thoſe who had purchaſed the two former.

I am now called upon to publiſh a new edition of the whole in a ſmaller letter, which reduces the work to two volumes. The chief difference between this and the former edition in three volumes is this: that the *Supplement*, which before made a diſtinct volume, is now taken into the body of the work: the ſeveral additions and illuſtrations are inſerted in the places to which they reſpectively belong: and all that related to one author is laid together in a continued ſeries. To render that part of the work which relates to Lord Bolingbroke more complete, there

are

are ſubjoined to it, the *Reflections on the late Lord Bolingbroke's Letters on the Study and Uſe of Hiſtory*, which were republiſhed in the Supplement, with conſiderable additions and improvements, though without the political part. The *General Reflections on the Deiſtical Writers*, together with the *Summary of the Evidences for Chriſtianity*, were originally placed at the end of the firſt volume, then intended to be the only one. But now that the whole is publiſhed together in two volumes, it is judged they will come more naturally in the ſecond volume of this edition; where alſo is placed, the *Addreſs to the Deiſts and profeſſed Chriſtians*, which properly concludes the work; and the *Reflections on the preſent State of Things in theſe Nations* are added by way of *Appendix*. It gives me ſome concern, that this work is become ſo much larger than was at firſt intended, which I am afraid will prove a diſadvantage to it, and diſguſt or diſcourage ſome readers. But I hope favourable allowances will be made, conſidering the extent of the deſign, and the variety of matters here treated of. I believe it will appear, that there are few objections which have been advanced in this controverſy, but what are taken notice of in the following work, and either ſufficiently obviated, or references are made to books where fuller anſwers are to be found.

May God in his holy providence follow what is now publiſhed with his bleſſing, that it may prove of real ſervice to the important intereſts of religion among us, to promote which, as far as my ability reaches, I ſhall ever account the greateſt happineſs of my life. And it ſhould be the matter of our earneſt prayers to God, that all thoſe who

who value themſelves upon the honourable name and privileges of Chriſtians, may join in united efforts to ſupport ſo glorious a cauſe, in which the preſervation and advancement of true religion and virtue, the peace and good order of ſociety, and the preſent and eternal happineſs of individuals, are ſo nearly concerned.

I have nothing farther to add, but that in this as well as the former editions, the whole is conducted in a ſeries of letters, which were written to my moſt worthy and much eſteemed friend, the reverend Dr. Thomas Wilſon, rector of Walbrook, and prebendary of Weſtminſter, in the form in which they now appear.

CON-

CONTENTS

OF THE

FIRST VOLUME.

LETTER I.—Page 1.

SOME Account of thoſe that firſt took upon them the Name of Deiſts—Obſervations on Lord Herbert of Cherbury's Scheme.

LETTER II.—P. 16.

Farther Obſervations on Lord Herbert's Scheme.

POSTSCRIPT.—P. 25.

An Account of a remarkable Incident relating to Lord Herbert of Cherbury—Reflections upon it.

LETTER III.—P. 35.

Obſervations on Mr. Hobbes's Writings.

LETTER IV.—P. 42.

Reflections on Mr. Charles Blount's and Mr. Toland's Writings.

LETTER V.—P. 54.

The Earl of Shafteſbury's Writings examined.

LETTER VI.—P. 73.

The Account given of the Earl of Shafteſbury's Writings in the foregoing Letter, vindicated.

LETTER VII.—P. 94.

An Account of Mr. Collins's Diſcourſe of Free-thinking, *and of his Book intitled* The Grounds of the Chriſtian Religion.

LETTER VIII.—P. 112.

Mr. Woolſton's Diſcourſes on the Miracles of our Saviour *conſidered.*

LET-

LETTER IX.—P. 124.

An Account of Dr. Tindal's Chriſtianity as old as the Creation.

LETTER X.—P. 145.

Dr. Morgan's Book, called The Moral Philoſopher, *examined.*

LETTER XI.—P. 167.

The Pamphlet intitled Chriſtianity not founded on Argument *examined.*

LETTER XII.—P. 185.

A Pamphlet intitled The Reſurrection of Jeſus conſidered, *examined and confuted.*

LETTER XIII.—P. 214.

An Account of Mr. Chubb's poſthumous Works.

LETTER XIV.—P. 233.

Some farther Remarks on Mr. Chubb's poſthumous Works.

LETTER XV.—P. 266.

Obſervations on a Pamphlet intitled Deiſm fairly ſtated, and fully vindicated—*A brief Account of Lord Bolingbroke's Attempt againſt the Scriptures, in his* Letters on the Study and Uſe of Hiſtory.

LETTER XVI.—P. 284.

Some general Obſervations upon Mr. Hume's Scheme in his Philoſophical Eſſays.

LETTER XVII.—P. 299.

Obſervations on Mr. Hume's Eſſay concerning a particular Providence and a future State.

LETTER XVIII.—P. 312.

An Examination of the firſt Part of Mr. Hume's Eſſay on Miracles, *which is deſigned to ſhew, that Miracles are incapable of being proved by any Evidence whatſoever.*

LETTER XIX.—P. 330.

Reflections on the ſecond Part of Mr. Hume's Eſſay on Miracles, *which*

which is designed to shew, that in fact there never was a miraculous Event, established upon such Evidence as can reasonably be depended upon—A particular Examination of what he has offered concerning the Miracles attributed to the Abbé de Paris.

LETTER XX.—P. 368.

Additional Observations relating to Mr. Hume, with Remarks on an ingenious Paper, containing an Examination of Mr. Hume's Arguments in his Essay on Miracles.

LETTER XXI.—P. 389.

Farther Reflections relating to the Abbé de Paris, and the great Sanctity ascribed to him—Observations on some Passages in Mr. Hume's Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals, *relating to* Self-denial, Mortification, *and* Humility.

POSTSCRIPT.—P. 403.

An Account of Mr. Douglas's Book, intitled The Criterion, or Miracles examined, *&c.*

LETTER XXII.—P. 407.

General Remarks on Lord Bolingbroke's posthumous Works.

LETTER XXIII.—P. 422.

An Inquiry into Lord Bolingbroke's Proofs of the Being and Attributes of GOD, *and his Sentiments concerning the divine Perfections.*

LETTER XXIV.—P. 449.

Lord Bolingbroke's Account of the Doctrine of divine Providence considered: and the Objections against a particular Providence examind.

VIEW

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VIEW

OF THE

DEISTICAL WRITERS, &c.

IN SEVERAL LETTERS TO A FRIEND.

LETTER I.

Some Account of thoſe that firſt took upon them the Name of Deiſts.—Lord Herbert of Cherbury, one of the moſt eminent deiſtical Writers that appeared in England in the laſt Age—His Attempt to form Deiſm into a Syſtem—Obſervations upon his Scheme, and upon the five Principles in which he makes all Religion to conſiſt—It is ſhewn that the Knowledge of them was very imperfect and defective in the heathen World; and that a Revelation from God for clearing and confirming thoſe important Principles might be of great Advantage.

DEAR SIR,

I NOW enter upon the taſk you have enjoined me, the giving ſome account of the principal deiſtical writers that have appeared among us for above a century paſt. The reaſons given by you, and other judicious friends, have convinced me that ſuch a work might be of uſe, if properly executed; we only differed as to the fitneſs of the perſon that was to execute it. My objections have been overruled; I muſt therefore ſet about it as well as I can: and if I were ſure that others would look upon this attempt with the ſame favourable eye that your candour and friendſhip for me will incline you to do, I ſhould be in no great pain about the ſucceſs of it.

The name of Deiſts, as applied to thoſe who are no friends to revealed religion, is ſaid to have been firſt aſſumed about the middle of the ſixteenth century, by ſome gentlemen in France

and Italy, who were willing to cover their oppoſition to the chriſtian revelation by a more honourable name than that of atheiſts. One of the firſt authors, as far as I can find, that makes expreſs mention of them, is Viret, a divine of great eminence among the firſt reformers, who in the epiſtle dedicatory prefixed to the ſecond tome of his *Inſtruction Chretienne*, which was publiſhed in 1563, ſpeaks of ſome perſons in that time who called themſelves by a new name, that of deiſts. Theſe, he tells us, profeſſed to believe a God, but ſhewed no regard to Jeſus Chriſt, and conſidered the doctrine of the apoſtles and evangeliſts as fables and dreams. He adds, that they laughed at all religion, notwithſtanding they conformed themſelves, with regard to the outward appearance, to the religion of thoſe with whom they were obliged to live, or whom they were deſirous of pleaſing, or whom they feared. Some of them, as he obſerves, profeſſed to believe the immortality of the ſoul; others were of the *Epicurean* opinion in this point, as well as about the providence of God with reſpect to mankind, as if he did not concern himſelf in the government of human affairs. He adds, that many among them ſet up for learning and philoſophy, and were looked upon to be perſons of an acute and ſubtle genius; and that, not content to periſh alone in their error, they took pains to ſpread the poiſon, and to infect and corrupt others, by their impious diſcourſes and bad examples*.

I leave it to you to judge, how far the account this learned author gives of the perſons that in his time called themſelves deiſts is applicable to thoſe among us who take upon them the ſame title, and which they ſeem to prefer to that of chriſtians, by which the diſciples of Jeſus have hitherto thought it their glory to be diſtinguiſhed. That which properly characterizes theſe deiſts is, that they reject all revealed religion, and diſcard all pretences to it, as owing to impoſture or enthuſiaſm. In this they all agree, and in profeſſing a regard for natural religion, though they are far from being agreed in their notions of it. They are claſſed by ſome of their own writers into two ſorts, mortal and immortal deiſts†. The latter acknowledge a future ſtate: the former deny it, or at leaſt repreſent it as a very uncertain thing: and though theſe are, by ſome among themſelves, repreſented under a very

* See Bayle's Dictionary, article Viret.

† Oracles of Reaſon, p. 99.

dif-

diſadvantageous character, and as little better than atheiſts, they are, it is to be feared, the more numerous of the two. Indeed ſome of their moſt eminent modern writers ſeem to be very eaſy about theſe differences. With them all are true deiſts who oppoſe revelation, whether they own future rewards and puniſhments or not: and they ſpeak with great regard of thoſe diſintereſted deiſts who profeſs to purſue virtue for its own ſake, without regard to future retributions*.

In giving an account of the deiſtical writers that have appeared in theſe nations (for I ſhall not meddle with thoſe of a foreign growth), I ſhall go back to the former part of the laſt century: and the firſt I ſhall mention, and who deſerves a particular notice, is that learned nobleman, Lord Edward Herbert, Baron of Cherbury. He may be juſtly regarded as the moſt eminent of the deiſtical writers, and in ſeveral reſpects ſuperior to thoſe that ſucceeded him. He may be alſo conſidered as the firſt remarkable deiſt in order of time, that appeared among us as a writer in the laſt century; for the firſt edition of his book *de Veritate* was in 1624, when it was firſt publiſhed at Paris. It was afterwards publiſhed at London, as was alſo his book *de Cauſis Errorum*, to which is ſubjoined his treatiſe *de Religione Laici*. Some years after this, and when the author was dead, his celebrated work *de Religione Gentilium* was publiſhed at Amſterdam, in 1663, in quarto; and it was afterwards re-printed there in 1700, octavo, which is the edition I make uſe of; and an Engliſh tranſlation of it was publiſhed at London in 1705.

His Lordſhip ſeems to have been one of the firſt that formed deiſm into a ſyſtem, and aſſerted the ſufficiency, univerſality, and abſolute perfection, of natural religion, with a view to diſcard all extraordinary revelation as uſeleſs and needleſs. He ſeems to aſſume to himſelf the glory of having accompliſhed it with great labour, and a diligent inſpection into all religions, and applauds himſelf for it, as happier than any Archimedes†. This univerſal religion he reduceth to five articles, which he frequently mentioneth in all his works. 1. That there is one ſupreme God. 2. That he is chiefly to be worſhipped. 3. That piety and virtue are the principal part of his worſhip. 4. That we muſt repent

* See Chriſtianity as old as the Creation, p. 332, 333. ed. 8vo.

† De Relig. Gent. c. 15. init.

of our ſins; and if we do ſo, God will pardon them. 5. That there are rewards for good men, and puniſhments for bad men, in a future ſtate: or, as he ſometimes expreſſeth it, both here and hereafter. Theſe he repreſents as common notices inſcribed by God on the minds of all men, and undertakes to ſhew that they were univerſally acknowledged in all nations, ages, and religions. This is particularly the deſign of his book *de Religione Gentilium;* though it is but comparatively a ſmall part of that work which tendeth directly to prove that theſe articles univerſally obtained: the far greater part of it is taken up with an account of the heathen religion and ceremonies, which he hath performed with an abundance of learning, and hath intermixed many ſoftening apologies for the pagan ſuperſtition and idolatry.

As he repreſents theſe five articles as abſolutely neceſſary, the five pillars, as he calls them, on which all religion is built; ſo he endeavours to ſhew that they alone are ſufficient, and that nothing can be added to them which can tend to render any man more virtuous, or a better man. But then he ſubjoins this limitation, "provided theſe articles be well explained in their full latitude*." This univerſal religion which all men agree in, his Lordſhip repreſents to be the only religion of which there can be any certainty, and he endeavours to ſhew the great advantages that would ariſe from men's embracing this religion, and this only. One of the reaſons he offers to recommend it is this, that this catholic or univerſal religion anſwers the ultimate deſign of the holy ſcriptures. "*Sacrarum literarum fini ultimo intentionique quadrat.*" He adds, that "all the doctrines there taught aim at the eſtabliſhment of theſe five catholic articles, as we have often hinted; "there is no ſacrament, rite, or ceremony there enjoined, but "what aims, or ſeems to aim, at the eſtabliſhment of theſe five "articles." See his reaſons at the end of his *Religio Laici.*

One would be apt to think by what this noble writer here offers, that he muſt have a very favourable opinion of Chriſtianity as contained in the holy ſcriptures; ſince he repreſents it as the great deſign of all its doctrines, and even of the rites and ſacraments there enjoined, to eſtabliſh thoſe great principles in which he makes religion properly to conſiſt. Accordingly he ex-

* Appendix to Relig. Laici, qu. 3d.

preſsly

preſsly declares in the above-mentioned treatiſe, that it was far from his intention to do harm to *the beſt religion*, as he there calls Chriſtianity, or the true faith, but rather to eſtabliſh both*.

But I am ſorry that I am obliged to ſay, that, notwithſtanding theſe fair profeſſions, his Lordſhip on all occaſions inſinuateth prejudices againſt all revealed religion, as abſolutely uncertain, and of little or no uſe. He inveigheth promiſcuouſly, as many others have done ſince, againſt all pretences to revelation, without making a diſtinction between the falſe and the true. He often ſpeaks to the diſadvantage of *particular* religion, which is a name he beſtoweth on the Chriſtian religion, and any revelation that is not actually known and promulgated to the whole world: and he repreſenteth it as containing doctrines, which diſguſt ſome men againſt all religion, and therefore is for recommending what he calls the univerſal religion, as the beſt way to prevent men's having no religion at all. And particularly he inſinuates, that the Chriſtian religion granteth pardon on too eaſy terms, and derogateth from the obligations to virtue†: a reflection which is manifeſtly owing to a miſapprehenſion or miſrepreſentation of the doctrine of Chriſtianity on this head. So he elſewhere ſuppoſeth, that the faith there required is no more than a bare aſſent to the doctrines there taught; though nothing is capable of a clearer proof, than that the faith on which ſo great a ſtreſs is laid in the goſpel-covenant is to be underſtood of a vital operative principle, which purifieth the heart, and is productive of good works; and that the neceſſity of true holineſs and virtue is there ſtrongly inculcated. The charge he advanceth againſt Chriſtianity might be more juſtly retorted upon himſelf, who, though he mentions it to the praiſe of his univerſal religion, that it giveth no licence to ſin, but bindeth men ſtrictly to the ſeverity of virtue, yet to ſhew what reaſon ſinners have to hope for pardon, offereth ſeveral pleas and excuſes that tend to extenuate the guilt of ſin. Particularly he urgeth, that men's ſins are not for the moſt part committed out of enmity againſt God, or to caſt diſhonour upon him, but with a view to their own particular advantage or pleaſure, and are choſen by them under the appearance of ſome

* Relig. Laici, p. 28.

† See the appendix to his Relig. Laici, qu. 6.

good*. And in his book *de Veritate* he declares, that thoſe are not lightly to be condemned, who are carried to ſin by their particular bodily conſtitution; and he inſtances particularly in the rage of luſt and anger; no more than a dropſical perſon is to be blamed for his immoderate thirſt, or a lethargic perſon for his lazineſs and inactivity. He adds indeed, that he does not ſet up as an apologiſt for wicked men, but yet that we ought to paſs a mild cenſure upon thoſe who are carried to ſin by a corporal and almoſt neceſſary propenſity to vice. *Neque tamen me hic conſceleratí cujuſvis patronum ſiſto; ſed in id ſolummodo contendo, ut mitiori ſententia de iis ſtatuamus, qui corporea, brutali, & tantum non neceſſaria propenſione in peccata prolabuntur.* This apology may be carried very far, ſo as to open a wide door to licentiouſneſs, and would ſoon introduce a very looſe morality.

But not to inſiſt upon this, I would obſerve that the principal deſign of his treatiſe *de Religione Laici* ſeems to be to ſhew, that the people can never attain to any ſatisfaction as to the truth and certainty of any particular revelation, and therefore muſt reſt in the five articles agreed to by all religions. This particularly is the intention of his fourth and fifth queries in the appendix to that treatiſe. In his fourth query he ſuppoſes, that the things which are added to thoſe common principles from the doctrines of faith are uncertain in their original; and that though God is true, the Laics can never be certain that what is pretended to be a revelation from God is indeed a true revelation from God. In his fifth query he urgeth, that ſuppoſing the originals to be true, yet they are uncertain in their explications. To this purpoſe he takes notice of the multiplicity of ſects among Chriſtians; and that the Laics can never be ſufficiently ſure of the meaning of the revelation, concerning which there are ſo many controverſies; that in order to arrive at any certainty in theſe matters, it would be neceſſary either to *learn all languages, to read all the celebrated writers, and to conſult all thoſe learned men that have not written*, a method which is manifeſtly abſurd and impracticable; or elſe to have recourſe to a *ſupreme judge of controverſies* appointed by common conſent.

It is an obſervation that will undoubtedly occur to you on this

* De Relig. Gentil. p. 268. Dr. Tindal talks in the ſame ſtrain. Chriſt. as old as the Creat. p. 32. ed. 8vo.

occaſion,

occaſion, that his Lordſhip here maketh uſe preciſely of the ſame way of talking, to ſhew that the Laics can have no certainty about any revelation at all, which the writers of the Romiſh Church have frequently urged to ſhew the neceſſity the people are under to rely entirely upon the authority of the Church or Pope, becauſe of the difficulties or the impoſſibility of their coming to any certainty in the way of examination or private judgment. But if the Laity cannot be certain of revealed religion, becauſe of the controverſies that have been raiſed about the articles of it, for the ſame reaſon it may be ſaid, that they can arrive at no certainty with reſpect to his Lordſhip's catholic univerſal religion: for though he repreſenteth men as univerſally agreed in the five articles in which he makes that religion to conſiſt, it is undeniable that there have been great controverſies about them; and that the modern deiſts, as well as ancient philoſophers, are divided in their ſentiments in relation to them, eſpecially when explained, as he requireth they ſhould be, in their full latitude. He ought not therefore to make a thing's being controverted to be a proof of its uncertainty, and that men can come to no ſatisfaction about it: a principle which he and other deiſts often inſiſt upon, but which manifeſtly leads to univerſal ſcepticiſm. But this is not the only inſtance, in which arguments have been brought againſt Chriſtianity, that in their conſequences tend to ſubvert all religion, and all evidence and certainty of reaſon.

From this general view of Lord Herbert's ſcheme, it ſufficiently appears that his deſign was to overturn all revealed, or, as he calls it, particular religion, and to eſtabliſh that natural and univerſal religion, the clearneſs and perfection of which he ſo much extols, in its room, as that which alone ought to be acknowledged and embraced as true and divine.

I ſhall now freely lay before you ſome obſervations that have occurred to me in conſidering the ſcheme of this noble author.

One is this, that he hath carried his account of natural religion much farther than ſome others of the deiſts have done. It were to be wiſhed, that all that glory in this character would agree with this noble Lord in a hearty reception of thoſe articles which he repreſenteth as ſo eſſentially neceſſary, and of ſuch vaſt importance. Theſe he would have to be explained in their full extent, and that except they be properly explained they are not

ſufficient. Thus explained, they include the belief not only of the exiſtence, but the attributes of God; of ſome of which, in his book *de Veritate*, he gives a good account, and of his providence and moral government. He aſſerts, that God is to be worſhipped, and that this worſhip includeth our offering up to him our prayers and thankſgivings*; that piety and virtue are abſolutely neceſſary to our acceptance with God: and he particularly urgeth the neceſſity of obſerving the ten commandments: that we are obliged to repent of our ſins in order to our obtaining forgiveneſs, and that this repentance includeth both a ſorrow for our ſins, and a turning from them to the right way. He alſo inſiſteth upon the belief of the immortality of the ſoul, and a future ſtate of rewards and puniſhments, in which God will recompenſe men *according to their actions*, and even *according to their thoughts*†. Theſe things he ſuppoſeth to be common notices, ſo clear that he can ſcarce be accounted a reaſonable creature who denieth them. And yet I am afraid, if all theſe things are to be looked upon as neceſſary, many that call themſelves deiſts will be as loth to admit his Lordſhip's natural and catholic religion, as chriſtianity itſelf. There is reaſon to apprehend, that ſome of their ſtrongeſt prejudices againſt chriſtianity ariſe from its ſetting thoſe principles in too clear a light, and enforcing them in too ſtrong a manner. It is true, that when they are for putting a fair gloſs upon deiſm, and aſſerting the ſufficiency and perfection of natural religion abſtracted from all revelation, they are willing to have it thought that their religion includeth the belief of thoſe important articles. They are then obliged to have recourſe to his Lordſhip's ſyſtem, and the arms he hath furniſhed them with; but at other times they make it plainly appear that they are far from being fixed in theſe principles. His Lordſhip declares, that it is neceſſary theſe articles ſhould be well explained: but indeed they are expreſſed in very general and indefinite terms, and there is no great likelihood of their agreeing in the explications of them. It is a thing well known, that many who have made no ſmall figure among our modern deiſts have denied ſome of his Lordſhip's five articles, at leaſt taken in the extent in which he ſeems willing to underſtand them. God's moral government and particular providence; his worſhip, eſpecially as it includes prayer and praiſe; man's free

* De Veritate, p. 271, 272. † De Relig. Gentil. p. 283.

agency,

agency, the immortality of the ſoul, and a future ſtate of retributions, have made no part of their creed. Some of them have been far from pleading for that ſtrictneſs of virtue which his Lordſhip tells us natural religion obliges men to; and, inſtead of urging the neceſſity of repentance, have, after Spinoſa, repreſented it as a mean, an unreaſonable, and wretched thing*. And the rewards and puniſhments of a future ſtate have been exploded under the notion of bribes and terrors, a regard to which argueth a ſordid and mercenary temper of ſoul, inconſiſtent with a true and generous virtue.

Another reflection that it is proper to make on Lord Herbert's ſcheme is this: that theſe five principles, in which he makes his univerſal religion to conſiſt, were not ſo very clear and well known to all mankind, as to make an external revelation needleſs or uſeleſs. His Lordſhip indeed ſuppoſeth them to be common notices, inſcribed by a divine hand in the minds of men; and accordingly he ſets himſelf to prove, with a great ſhew of learning, in his book *de Religione Gentilium*, that theſe principles were univerſally believed and acknowledged by the people in all ages, countries, and religions. But any man that carefully examines his book will find, that all that he really proves is no more than this; that there were ſome imperfect veſtiges of theſe important truths preſerved among the Gentiles, and that the knowledge of them was never abſolutely and totally extinguiſhed, which will be eaſily allowed. But he has not proved, that the people, or even all thoſe that paſſed for wiſe and learned, had a diſtinct knowledge and aſſurance of thoſe principles, eſpecially if taken in their juſt extent. The teſtimonies he hath produced by no means prove ſuch an univerſal agreement: what he ſeemeth principally to rely upon is the reaſonableneſs and evidence of the principles themſelves, which he ſuppoſeth to be ſo plain, that no rational man can be ignorant of them. Thus he declares, that he would ſooner doubt whether the beams of the ſun ſhone upon thoſe regions, than ſuppoſe that the knowledge of God, the evidences of whoſe exiſtence and perfections are ſo obvious from his works, did not enlighten their minds†. And he cannot be perſuaded, that any of them worſhipped the ſun as the chief

* Pœnitentia virtus non eſt, ſive ex ratione non oritur: quem facti pœnitet bis miſer ſeu impotens eſt. Spin. Eth. Pt. 4. Prop. 54.

† De Relig. Gentil. p. 225.

deity,

deity, becauſe of the incredible abſurdity of ſuch a practice, which he well expoſes *. But when we are inquiring what men do in fact believe and practiſe, we are not to judge of it from what we apprehend it is reaſonable for them to believe and practiſe.

If this were a proper place to take a diſtinct view of the proofs he hath offered in relation to his famous five articles, it would be no hard matter to ſhew, that, according to his own repreſentation of the caſe, they were not ſo univerſally acknowledged and clearly known among the Gentiles, as to make a farther revelation and enforcement of them to be of no uſe or advantage. This might be particularly ſhewn with regard to the firſt and ſecond of theſe articles, viz. That there is one ſupreme God, and that this God is to be worſhipped; which are principles of the greateſt importance, and which lie at the foundation of all the reſt. Nothwithſtanding the pains he hath taken to excuſe and palliate the pagan ſuperſtition and idolatry, and to prove that they worſhipped the one true God, the ſame that we adore, under various names, and by various attributes; yet he owns, that what were at firſt only different names came, in proceſs of time, as ſuperſtition increaſed, to be regarded and worſhipped as different gods. It is plain, from expreſs and formal paſſages, produced by him from ancient writers, that ſome nations worſhipped no other deities but the ſun, moon, and ſtars. When in the third chapter of his book *de Relig. Gentil.* he mentions the names of the Deity which were in uſe among the Hebrews, and ſhews that thoſe names and titles were alſo uſed among the Gentiles; he owneth that the Hebrews appropriated theſe names and titles to the one ſupreme God, ſuperior to the ſun, but that the Gentiles underſtood by them no other than the ſun itſelf. He thinks it indeed probable that the worſhip they rendered to the ſun was ſymbolical, and that they intended to worſhip God by the ſun, as his moſt glorious ſenſible image; and ſometimes he is very poſitive that they did ſo, and that they rendered no proper worſhip to any but the ſupreme God; but at other times he ſpeaks very doubtfully about it, and pretends not poſitively to aſſert it, but leaves the reader to his own judgment in this matter †. And elſewhere he acknowledges, that the people perhaps did not ſufficiently

* De Relig. Gentil. p. 27, 247. † Ibid. p. 25. 310.

ficiently underſtand this ſymbolical worſhip. *Symbolicum illum cultum haud ſatis forſan intellexit*?* It is indeed a little ſtrange, that if the notion and belief of one only ſupreme God univerſally obtained among the Gentiles, none but the Hebrews ſhould have made the acknowledgement of the One ſupreme God, the Maker and Lord of the univerſe, the fundamental article of their religion; and that in the laws of other ſtates, particularly among the learned and polite nations of Greece and Rome, polytheiſm was eſtabliſhed, and the public worſhip was directed to be offered to a multiplicity of deities. Many of the heathens, by his own acknowledgement, thought that the God they were to worſhip ſhould be viſible, and looked upon it to be incongruous, that he who demanded worſhip from all ſhould hide himſelf from his worſhippers †. And though it was a notion which generally obtained among them, that ſome kind of external worſhip was neceſſary to be rendered to their deities, yet as to the manner of their worſhip he doth not deny that ſome of the heathen rites were ridiculous, others abſurd and even impious. To which it may be added, that ſome of their wiſeſt men acknowledged, that they were ignorant of the proper manner in which God is to be worſhipped, except he himſelf, or ſome perſon ſent by him, ſhould pleaſe to reveal it. There is a remarkable paſſage in Plato's ſecond *Alcibiad*, which hath been often quoted. Socrates, meeting Alcibiades, who was going to the temple to pray, proves to him that he knew not how to perform that duty aright, and that therefore it was not ſafe for him to do it; but that he ſhould wait for a divine inſtructor to teach him how to behave both towards the gods and men; and that it was neceſſary that God ſhould ſcatter the darkneſs which covered his ſoul, that he might be put in a condition to diſcern good and evil. To the ſame purpoſe, Iamblichus, in *Vita Pythag.* c. 28. ſpeaking of the principles of divine worſhip, ſaith, "It is manifeſt that thoſe things are to be "done which are pleaſing to God; but what they are it is not "eaſy to know, except a man were taught them by God himſelf, "or by ſome perſon that had received them from God, or ob"tained the knowledge of them by ſome divine means."

The third article mentioned by his Lordſhip as univerſally

* De Relig. Gentil. p. 293. † Ibid. p. 26.

agreed

agreed on is, that piety and virtue are the principal part of God's worſhip. But not to urge that the proof he brings of an univerſal agreement in this principle ſeems to be very defective, this article would be of no great uſe, except men were alſo generally agreed as to the nature and extent of true piety and virtue. And it can ſcarce be reaſonably denied, that a revelation from God, pointing out our way to us, and containing a clear ſignification of the divine will with regard to the particulars of the duty required of us, would be of great uſe. Lord Herbert himſelf, after having mentioned ſome virtues which were honoured among the pagans, acknowledgeth, that beſides theſe there were many other things looked upon to be neceſſary to true piety, eſpecially thoſe things which ſhewed a devout or grateful temper towards the gods, and the obſervance of the public rites and ceremonies of religion*; which is in other words to ſay, that the joining in ſuperſtitious and idolatrous worſhip (for ſuch the eſtabliſhed public worſhip was) made up a neceſſary part of the heathen piety and virtue, and was counted a principal ingredient in a good man's character.

As to the fourth article, that men muſt repent of their ſins, and that if they do ſo God will pardon them, it might eaſily be ſhewn that the Gentiles were far from being agreed what are to be accounted ſins; ſince ſome ſins and vices of a very enormous kind were not only practiſed and pleaded for by ſome of their philoſophers, but permitted and countenanced by the public laws, nor were they agreed what is included in a true repentance.—His Lordſhip himſelf acknowlegeth, that the ancients ſeldom uſed the word repentance in the ſenſe in which we take it†; and that they did not look upon it to be an atonement for all crimes, but for thoſe of a leſs heinous nature; and that they generally looked upon other things to be alſo neceſſary, and laid the principal ſtreſs upon luſtrations, and the rites of their religion, for purifying and abſolving them from guilt. And any one who duly conſiders, that the diſpenſing of pardon is an act of the divine prerogative, the exerciſe of which depends upon what ſeemeth moſt fit to his ſupreme governing wiſdom, cannot but be ſenſible that it muſt needs be a great advantage to be aſſured, by an ex-

* De Relig. Gentil. p. 250. † Ibid. p. 268.

preſs

preſs revelation from God, upon what terms the pardon of ſin is to be obtained, and how far it is to extend.

With regard to the fifth article about future rewards and puniſhments, which he repreſenteth to be, as it really is, of vaſt importance, though he ſometimes expreſſeth himſelf as if the heathens were generally agreed, that good men would be rewarded with eternal life; at other times he intimates that they only agreed in this, that there would be rewards and puniſhments in a future ſtate; and ſometimes, that they held this only, that there would be rewards for good men, and puniſhments for bad men, either in this life or after it. And he himſelf frequently owns in his book *de Veritate*, that what kind of rewards ſhall be conferred, or puniſhments inflicted, cannot be certainly known from the light of natural reaſon *.

But we need not inſiſt farther on theſe things. His Lordſhip himſelf fairly granteth, that the knowledge the Gentiles had of the One ſupreme God was lame and imperfect; which he attributes to the ſloth or cunning of the Prieſts, who neglected to inſtruct the people, or inſtructed them wrong; and that from thence it came to paſs, that, the rays of the divine light being intercepted, a wonderful darkneſs overſpread the minds of the vulgar. "*Unde etiam factum, ut radiis divini luminis interceptis, mira caligo vulgi animis obducta eſſet* †." And he obſerves, that by what was added by the prieſts, poets, and philoſophers, the whole fabric of truth was in danger of falling to the ground. *Tota inclinata in caſumque prona nutavit veritatis fabrica* ‡. And at the cloſe of this book *de Relig. Gentil.* he owns, that at length the purer parts of divine worſhip being neglected, the whole of religion ſunk by degrees into ſuperſtition: and that thoſe five articles were almoſt overwhelmed with a heavy load of errors, ſo as to be perceived only by the wiſer ſort of men, *a perſpicacioribus viris*, i. e. by thoſe who had a penetration above the vulgar §.

Now this being a true repreſentation of the caſe as it ſtood in fact, whatever it was owing to, it can ſcarce be reaſonably denied, that if God ſhould, in compaſſion to the corrupt and igno-

* De Veritate, p. 57, & alibi.

† De Relig. Gent. p. 225. ‡ Ibid. p. 283. § Ibid. p. 310.

rant

rant ſtate of mankind, grant an expreſs revelation of his will, to clear and reſtore thoſe great principles which had been ſo much obſcured and perverted, to recover men to the right knowledge and worſhip of God, and to explain and enforce the main important parts of their duty, this would be of ſignal benefit to the world, and a remarkable proof and effect of his great goodneſs. His Lordſhip indeed, in ſeveral parts of his works, throws out hints and ſuſpicions as if either ſuch a revelation from God could not be given, or at leaſt that there can be no way of knowing, or being aſſured, that ſuch a revelation has been really given; but he no where offers any proof of it. The general invectives he ſo frequently makes againſt prieſts, oracles, impoſtures, prove nothing; except it be allowed to be a reaſonable principle, that becauſe there have been falſe pretenders to revelation, therefore there never was, nor can be a true one: a way of talking and reaſoning this, that might paſs among the inferior tribe of deiſtical writers, but which is abſolutely unworthy of his Lordſhip's ſenſe and learning. Whereas it may rather be gathered from it, that mankind in all ages have been generally perſuaded, that it was both poſſible for God to grant an extraordinary revelation of his will, and that, if he did, it would be of great advantage. Impoſtors have built upon this principle; but this doth not ſhew the principle itſelf to be falſe, which hath as good a title to paſs for a common notion, as ſome of the five articles which he repreſenteth to be ſo clear and univerſally acknowledged. The only reaſonable concluſion that can be drawn from the many impoſtures and falſe revelations which have been put upon mankind is, not that all pretences to revelation are falſe and vain, but that we ought to be very careful to diſtinguiſh the falſe from the true, and impartially to conſider and examine the proofs that are brought, and not to receive any revelation without ſufficient credentials of its divine authority. But it would be a moſt unreaſonable limitation of the divine power and wiſdom to affirm, either that God cannot make extraordinary diſcoveries of his will to particular perſons, in ſuch a manner that the perſons to whom they are immediately communicated may be certain that they came from God; or that he cannot commiſſion and enable ſuch perſons to communicate to others what they have received from him, or cannot furniſh them with ſuch credentials

dentials of their divine miſſion, as may be ſufficient to convince the world that they were ſent of God, and to make it reaſonable for others to receive the doctrines and laws which ſuch perſons deliver in his name. And it hath been proved, with great ſtrength and evidence, that this hath actually been the caſe with regard to the chriſtian revelation.

There are other reflections that might be made on Lord Herbert's ſyſtem. But I am willing to give you and myſelf a little reſpite, and ſhall therefore reſerve them to be the ſubject of another letter.

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LETTER II.

Farther Obſervations on Lord Herbert's Scheme—The Philoſophers not qualified to recover Mankind from the Darkneſs and Corruption into which they were fallen.—The Uſefulneſs of the Chriſtian Revelation to that Purpoſe.—Its not having been univerſally promulgated in all Nations and Ages, no juſt Prejudice againſt it—Other Objections of Lord Herbert conſidered —Writers that have appeared againſt him.

SIR,

IN my former letter an account was given of Lord Herbert's ſcheme; and it was ſhewn, that, taking the ſtate of mankind and of the Gentile world as it really was, according to his own repreſentation of the caſe, an expreſs revelation from God, confirmed by his divine authority, for clearing and enforcing thoſe articles which his Lordſhip ſuppoſeth to be neceſſary, would be of great uſe. I now add, that in fact the chriſtian revelation hath been of ſignal advantage to the world, for giving men a clearer knowledge and fuller certainty of thoſe important truths than they had before. Our noble author indeed ſpeaks with admiration of the ancient philoſophers, as capable of inſtructing men in a proper manner, if they would have attended to their inſtructions: but then he owns, that the people had little regard to the purer doctrine of the philoſophers*. And indeed I do not ſee how it could be expected, that they ſhould place any dependance upon their dictates, which were for the moſt part regarded only as the tenets of their ſeveral ſchools, in which the people had little concern. They were not the miniſters of religion, nor could pretend to any authority that ſhould make them be regarded as the guides and inſtructors of mankind, or cauſe their opinions to paſs for laws. The moſt eminent among them were contradicted by others of great name: many of them laboured to make all things appear doubtful and uncertain; and thoſe of them that had the nobleſt notions frequently affected to conceal them, or

* De Relig. Gentil. p. 310.

were

were afraid to divulge them. What Alcinous hath obſerved concerning Plato, with reſpect to the inquiry concerning the chief good, might be applied to ſome other matters of great importance. "That which is worthy of all honour, ſuch as the ſu-"preme Good, he conceived not eaſy to be found, and, if found, "not ſafe to be declared*." His Lordſhip aſſureth us, that the philoſophers were always diſpleaſed with the ſuperſtitious worſhip of the people. But, if this was the caſe, they ſeem to have been very improper perſons to reclaim them from it, ſince it was an univerſal maxim among them, and particularly recommended by one of the beſt of them, Epictetus, that every man ought to worſhip according to the laws or cuſtoms of his country†: And it is well known that their eſtabliſhed worſhip was polytheiſm and idolatry. Varro, in a paſſage quoted by his Lordſhip, divides the heathen theology into three kinds: the *fabulous*, which belonged to the poets; the *phyſical*, which was that of the philoſophers; and the *civil*. He ſpeaks with diſregard of the two former, and repreſents the laſt as that in which the people were concerned, and which alone could be of real uſe to them: and this he explaineth to be that which was eſtabliſhed by the laws, and adminiſtered by the prieſts, and which ſhewed what gods they were publicly to worſhip, what rites they were to obſerve, and what ſacrifices it was proper for any man to offer‡.

If a reformation of the world by the philoſophers was not to be expected, for the reaſons now given, his Lordſhip will own it was not to be hoped for from the prieſts, againſt whom he bitterly inveighs, as the authors of all ſuperſtition, and of the great corruption of religion in the heathen world. And as little was it to be expected from the lawgivers and great men of the ſtate, who generally patronized the eſtabliſhed ſuperſtition, of which they themſelves had been in a great meaſure the authors or promoters, and were ready to puniſh any that oppoſed it. And if there were any of them who were for reforming and correcting ſome abuſes in the public ſuperſtitions, and exploding ſome of the groſſer fables that were received among the people, as his Lordſhip

* See Alcinous's Doctrine of Plato, c. 27. in Stanley's Lives of the Philoſophers.

† Epict. Enchirid. c. 38.

‡ De Relig. Gent. p. 306, 307.

obſerves Mutius Scævola the chief pontiff, and Varro, were for doing, he owns that the attempts were vain and ineffectual, becauſe the errors and ſuperſtitions were become inveterate*. This being the true ſtate of the caſe, it is hard to ſee what other method could be taken, that would prove ſo effectual to recover mankind from their ſuperſtition and idolatry, as the giving an extraordinary revelation, attended with ſufficient credentials, to inſtruct men in the name of God, concerning the nature of true religion, to aſſure them of the certainty of its great principles, and to enforce the practice of its important duties by the ſtrongeſt and moſt prevailing motives.

And accordingly, when Chriſtianity appeared with the moſt illuſtrious atteſtations of a divine miſſion and revelation from heaven, it effected what no precepts or doctrines of the philoſophers had been able to do. The pagan polytheiſm and ſuperſtition fell before it: and it hath actually produced this great advantage, that the principles upon which our author layeth ſo much ſtreſs have been better known and underſtood, and more univerſally acknowledged, than they were before. It is inconteſtable, that Chriſtians are more generally agreed in thoſe great principles, than ever men were in the pagan world. They are ſet in a clearer light, and men come to a greater certainty about them. That they are ſo far preſerved among the Mahometans, was alſo originally owing to the light of the Jewiſh and Chriſtian revelation. And it is very probable that his Lordſhip himſelf is very much obliged to Chriſtianity, though he doth not acknowledge it, for the full perſuaſion he every where expreſſeth as to theſe important articles; ſeveral of which were denied by ſome, and doubted by others of the ancient philoſophers.

Though therefore it is not to be wondered at, that thoſe among the deiſts who have an averſion to theſe principles, when taken in their juſt extent, ſhould be againſt Chriſtianity, yet Lord Herbert, who aſſerteth them to be of ſuch vaſt conſequence, ought, one ſhould think, to have been very thankful to God for having enforced them by an expreſs and well-atteſted revelation, and given them a divine ſanction. And if he were ſincere in the acknowledgment he ſometimes makes, that the explaining and en-

* De Relig. Gen. p. 311.

forcing

forcing thoſe great principles is the ultimate deſign of the holy ſcripture, to which all its doctrines, and even its rites and ſacraments tend, he ought certainly to have entertained very favourable thoughts of Chriſtianity, of its doctrines as well as precepts, and even of its rites and poſitive inſtitutions.

But that which ſeemeth principally to have prejudiced his Lordſhip againſt Chriſtianity is, that it is what he calleth a *particular religion*; whereas the true religion muſt be univerſal, and promulgated to all mankind. He frequently urgeth, that nothing leſs than ſuch an univerſal religion as he pleadeth for can ſupport the honour of God's univerſal providence, and the care he exerciſeth towards the whole human race; which no particular religion can do; and that otherwiſe the Gentiles muſt be ſuppoſed to be univerſally loſt and damned, which it were cruel and injurious to God to imagine. This is what hath been often urged and repeated by the deiſts ſince.

To this it may be juſtly anſwered, that thoſe who maintain the Chriſtian revelation may think as honourably as any others conſiſtently can, of the univerſal care and providence of God towards mankind. No where is this more clearly aſſerted than in the ſacred writings, which declare God's univerſal goodneſs and benignity towards the human race in ſtrong terms; and that he hath been continually doing them good, and hath never left himſelf without witneſs among them. We muſt not indeed carry this ſo far as to aſſert, that all men have an actual knowledge of the great principles of religion, and of their duty, becauſe we may imagine that the univerſal care of providence towards mankind requireth that it ſhould be ſo; which ſeems to be the courſe of his Lordſhip's reaſoning; for this is contrary to evident and undeniable fact and experience. But we acknowledge that God hath given to all men the principle of reaſon, together with a natural ſenſe of right and wrong, which would be of great uſe to aſſiſt them in the knowledge of religion, and to direct them in the practice of their duty, if duly cultivated and improved to the utmoſt that it is naturally capable of. But beſides this, Chriſtians generally maintain, and the holy ſcriptures lead us to think, that God hath from time to time made extraordinary diſcoveries of his will to mankind; that ſome ſuch diſcoveries were made to the firſt anceſtors of the human race, who were bound by all obligations to tranſmit them to

their poſterity; that therefore there was an original univerſal religion, embraced by the firſt parents of mankind, and tranſmitted from them to their deſcendants; that accordingly ſome of the moſt eminent ancient philoſophers aſcribed the knowledge and belief of ſome of the great principles inſiſted upon by this noble author, to a tradition derived from the moſt early ages, though his Lordſhip never maketh the leaſt mention of tradition, as one ſource of that knowledge and belief of theſe things, which obtaineth among the nations; that this religion, which was both originally derived from revelation, and agreeable to nature and reaſon, was gradually obſcured, and became greatly corrupted, though ſtill ſome remarkable traces and veſtiges of it remained among the Gentiles; that God was pleaſed, in his wiſe and good providence, to interpoſe by various methods, and by raiſing up excellent perſons from time to time, to keep thoſe remains of the ancient religion from being totally extinguiſhed; that at laſt he was graciouſly pleaſed to ſend his Son into the world, a perſon of divine dignity and glory, to recover men to his true knowledge and pure worſhip, to direct and aſſiſt them in the practice of their duty, to ſhew them the true means of their reconciliation and acceptance with God, and to bring life and immortality into the moſt clear and open light; that this revelation was attended with the moſt illuſtrious atteſtations, and made a wonderful progreſs through a conſiderable part of the known world, and would have ſpread ſtill farther, if it had met with ſuch a reception as the excellency and importance of it well deſerved; and finally, that as to thoſe to whom it was actually communicated, God will deal with them in a juſt, a wiſe, and equitable way, and will make all proper allowances for any want of the advantages which others enjoy. The aſſerters of the Chriſtian revelation are under no obligations to limit God's univerſal benevolence. They leave thoſe that are deſtitute of this revelation to God's infinite mercy; and can think more favourably of their caſe, than thoſe conſiſtently can do, who will not allow that they were under any great darkneſs, and ſuppoſe them to have acted in manifeſt oppoſition to the moſt clear univerſal light.

The objection ariſing againſt the Chriſtian revelation, for want of its being univerſally known and promulgated, hath been often conſidered and obviated, nor is this a proper place to enter upon a large

a large and particular diſcuſſion of it. At preſent it may be ſufficient to obſerve, that the objection proceeds upon a wrong foundation, *viz.* that the univerſal goodneſs and benignity of the common Parent of the univerſe require that he ſhould communicate his benefits to all his creatures alike, and in equal degrees. It is evident, in fact, that in the diſtribution of his benefits God acteth as a free and ſovereign benefactor, diſpenſing them in very various degrees, always undoubtedly for wiſe reaſons, but thoſe reaſons often not known to us. It cannot reaſonably be denied, that he hath made ſome whole claſſes of beings vaſtly ſuperior to others in valuable gifts and endowments, and capacities for happineſs: and ſome individuals of the ſame claſs of beings are favoured with much greater advantages than others. And, if we look particularly into God's dealings with the human race, we may obſerve a very remarkable variety. Some are from the beginning endued with much greater natural abilities and more excellent diſpoſitions, and are placed in a more favourable ſituation and happier circumſtances. Some whole nations are eminently diſtinguiſhed from others, not only with reſpect to many other advantages of human life, but with reſpect to the means of moral improvement, and are furniſhed with more excellent helps for making a progreſs in wiſdom and virtue, and conſequently in true happineſs. All theſe differences between perſons and nations are under the direction of divine providence, as all muſt own that acknowledge a providence, as his Lordſhip profeſſeth to do. And thoſe that are diſtinguiſhed from others by ſuperior advantages ought to be thankful to God for thoſe advantages, and to aſcribe them to his goodneſs, and not deny that God hath given them thoſe advantages, becauſe there are others that have them not, or not in an equal degree. Since therefore the diſtinguiſhing ſome perſons and nations with valuable advantages above others is not inconſiſtent with the univerſal benignity of the great Parent of mankind (for if it were, he would not do it), it can never be proved, that he may not grant a revelation to any part of mankind, except at the ſame time it be granted equally to the whole world. Indeed, if all men every where were required actually to believe that revelation, and were to be condemned for not believing it, it would be neceſſary to have it univerſally promulgated; but ſince the actual belief of it is required of thoſe only

to whom it is actually publiſhed, and they to whom it is not made known are not put into a worſe condition than if there had been no ſuch revelation granted at all, no argument can be brought to ſhew that it is inconſiſtent with the divine wiſdom or goodneſs, to grant ſuch a revelation to ſome part of mankind, though it be not actually promulgated to the whole human race: eſpecially if, in its own nature and original intention, it was fitted and deſigned to be of univerſal extent; which is the caſe of the Chriſtian revelation. Thoſe therefore who are ſo circumſtanced as to have an opportunity of knowing it, ought to be very thankful to God on that account, and not refuſe or reject their own advantages and privileges, becauſe all others are not partakers of them as well as they. This would be a moſt abſurd and irrational conduct.

I ſhall only further obſerve, that this author ſeems frequently to make it a great objection againſt what he calls *particular religion*, that it inſiſteth upon other things as neceſſary, beſides the religion of nature, as contained in theſe five articles. Religion, according to him, is *notitiarum communium ſymbolum**, a creed containing common notions or truths: and theſe common notices he reduceth to the five above-mentioned. But will any man undertake to prove, that God cannot reveal any truths to mankind, but preciſely theſe five articles, or that all uſeful religious knowledge is wholly abſorpt in them? May there not be truths which, though not preciſely the ſame with thoſe articles, may be of great uſe for clearing and confirming them, for inſtructing men in the fuller knowledge of God, and of his will, and of the methods of his grace towards us, or for directing us in our duty, and animating us to the practice of it? And muſt all theſe be diſcarded at once, as of no uſe in religion, becauſe they are diſtinct from the articles ſo often referred to? Or muſt a well-atteſted revelation be rejected, becauſe it containeth ſome things of this kind? Our noble author himſelf, though he ſuppoſes theſe articles to be abſolutely neceſſary, ſeems not to be quite ſure that they are ſufficient; for he obſerves, that God's judgments and proceedings are not fully known to any man; and therefore he will not take upon him poſitively to pronounce, that

* De Verit. p. 55. 221.

theſe

theſe articles are ſufficient. *Quam ob cauſam neque eos ſufficere protinus dixerim**. But if they ſhould be ſuppoſed to comprehend all that is required from the heathens, who never had the light of the Chriſtian revelation, it doth not follow that they are alſo alone ſufficient for thoſe to whom this revelation is made known: for ſuppoſing God to give an extraordinary revelation of his will for reſtoring religion when greatly corrupted, and clearly directing men in the way of ſalvation, and helping forward their improvement in divine knowledge, and in a holy and virtuous practice, as it would be a ſignal advantage to thoſe to whom ſuch a revelation is given, ſo it muſt neceſſarily lay them under additional obligations. Some things would, in conſequence of it, be neceſſary to be believed and done, by thoſe to whom this revelation is made known, which they were not ſo expreſsly obliged to believe and practiſe before: and it would be a ſtrange thing to complain againſt that revelation on this account, or accuſe it of falſehood, and to chooſe rather to be without the ſignal advantage of ſuch a revelation, and its glorious benefits, privileges, and hopes, than to be obliged to receive the diſcoveries it brings, and to practiſe the duties which reſult from them.

One of the firſt Engliſh writers that publiſhed animadverſions on Lord Herbert's ſcheme (for I ſhall not take notice of what ſome learned foreigners have done this way) was Mr. Richard Baxter, in a book publiſhed in 1672, which he calls, *More Reaſons for the Chriſtian Religion, and no Reaſon againſt it:* and which he deſigned as an appendix to his excellent treatiſe of the reaſons of the Chriſtian religion. One part of this book contains, "Animadverſions on a Tractate *de Veritate*, written by the noble "and learned Lord Edward Herbert, Baron of Cherbury." This writer makes judicious reflections on ſeveral paſſages in that book, but takes no notice of his Tract *de Religione Laici*, nor of that learned work *de Religione Gentilium*, which probably he had not ſeen. The celebrated Mr. Locke, in his *Eſſay on Human Underſtanding*, hath ſome obſervations on Lord Herbert's five articles, to ſhew, that, however reaſonable they may appear to be, they cannot be juſtly accounted common notices in the ſenſe in which that Lord repreſents them; *viz.* as clearly inſcribed by the

* De Relig. Gentil. p. 293.

hand of God in the minds of all men*. And in his *Reaſonableneſs of Chriſtianity as delivered in the Scriptures*, he hath, without formally mentioning Lord Herbert, furniſhed a proper antidote againſt his ſcheme, by ſhewing, with great clearneſs and force, the uſefulneſs of divine revelation, for ſetting the great principles of the law of nature, and the important duties of religion and morality in a ſtrong and convincing light, and enforcing them with the moſt powerful motives; and that the mere natural unaſſiſted light of reaſon was, as things were circumſtanced, inſufficient and ineffectual for that purpoſe†. This matter is alſo fully and diſtinctly treated in Dr. Whitby's learned work, intituled, *The Neceſſity and Uſefulneſs of the Chriſtian Revelation, by Reaſon of the Corruptions of the Principles of natural Religion among Jews and Heathens*. London, 8vo, 1705.

The only author among us, that I know, who hath formally conſidered the whole of Lord Herbert's ſcheme, and undertaken a direct anſwer to his writings, is the reverend Mr. Halyburton, profeſſor of divinity in the univerſity of St. Andrews, in a book which was publiſhed after the author's death, at Edinburgh, in 1714, 4to, intituled, *Natural Religion inſufficient, and Revealed neceſſary to Man's Happineſs* ——— "in which, particularly, "the writings of the learned Lord Herbert, the great patron of "deiſm; to wit, his books *de Veritate*, *de Religione Gentilium*, "and his *Religio Laici*, in ſo far as they aſſert nature's light able "to conduct us to future bleſſedneſs, are conſidered, and fully "anſwered." In this elaborate performance he ſets himſelf largely and diſtinctly to ſhew that the light of nature is greatly defective, even with reſpect to the diſcoveries of a Deity, and the worſhip that is to be rendered to him; with reſpect to the inquiry concerning man's true happineſs; with reſpect to the rule of duty, and the motives for enforcing obedience: that it is unable certainly to diſcover the means of obtaining pardon of ſin; or to eradicate inclinations to ſin, and ſubdue its power. And, laſtly, he argues its inſufficiency, from a general view of the experience of the world. He afterwards proceeds diſtinctly to conſider the five articles to which the Lord Herbert reduces his

* Eſſay on Human Underſtanding, book i. c. 3. ſ. 15, 16, 17, 18, 19.

† See his works, vol. ii. p. 574, & ſeq. 4th edit.

catholic

catholic religion. He anſwers the proofs his Lordſhip has brought to ſhew that theſe articles did univerſally obtain; and, on the contrary, offers ſeveral proofs to ſhew that they did not ſo obtain. And he endeavours diſtinctly to anſwer the principal arguments and pleas urged by Lord Herbert; and, after him, by Mr. Blount, for the ſufficiency of natural religion. Whoſoever carefully examines what this learned and pious author has offered on theſe ſeveral heads will find many excellent things; though the narrowneſs of his notions in ſome points hath prejudiced ſome perſons againſt his work, and hindered them from regarding and conſidering it ſo much as it deſerves.

I ſhall here conclude my account of Lord Herbert, in which I have been the more particular, becauſe as he was one of the firſt, ſo he was confeſſedly one of the greateſt writers that have appeared among us in the deiſtical cauſe.

POSTSCRIPT.

A remarkable Incident relating to Lord Herbert conſidered.

SIR,

AFTER I had finiſhed the two foregoing letters, I ſaw a large anonymous letter, which was ſent to you, and by you communicated to me, relating to Lord Herbert of Cherbury. This letter deſerves particular notice; and what I have to obſerve upon it may be properly inſerted here, immediately after the obſervations which have been made upon that noble writer in the preceding letters. I readily agree with this gentleman in acknowledging, what, as he obſerves, Mr. Baxter owns in his animadverſions on Lord Herbert's tract *de Veritate*, that there are excellent things in that book, and that many of the rules there propoſed may be of great uſe. But I had no occaſion to take particular notice of them, as I propoſed only to make ſome general obſervations on his Lordſhip's ſcheme, as far as the cauſe of Chriſtianity is concerned. I hope the writer of that letter, who appears to be a man of ſenſe, and a friend to Chriſtianity, as well as a great admirer of Lord Herbert, will find, on peruſing the foregoing reflections, that I have done his Lordſhip juſtice, and not puſhed the charge againſt him farther than there is juſt

ground

ground for it. What I have there ſaid is perfectly agreeable to what this ingenious gentleman has obſerved in this letter; where, after having ſaid that Lord Herbert is commonly reputed to have been the firſt ſtarter of deiſm in the laſt century, he adds, "Supposing the charge to be true, as I greatly ſuſpect it is, yet I am "convinced upon ſeveral good reaſons, that he was nevertheleſs "a deiſt of more honour, and of greater candour and decency, "as he was of far greater parts and learning, than many that have "appeared under that denomination ſince." He ſubjoins, "Had "he lived in theſe days, wherein the ſubject, then new, has been "thoroughly canvaſſed, and no ſtone left unturned to find out "the truth, and bring it into fair light; I own I have charity "enough to ſuppoſe, and almoſt to believe, that Lord Herbert "would either have been an advocate for revelation, or at leaſt "have forborne oppoſing it."

This gentleman takes notice of a manuſcript which he had lately ſeen, containing the life of the Lord Herbert of Cherbury, drawn up from memorials penned by himſelf, and which is now in the poſſeſſion of a gentleman of diſtinction whom he does not name. He mentions that Lord's good conduct when he was ambaſſador at Paris, and ſome other things that do not come within the compaſs of my deſign, which is not to give an account of the lives and characters of the authors I mention, but only to conſider their writings, and theſe no farther than they relate to the controverſy between the Chriſtians and the deiſts. But there is one thing in that manuſcript life of Lord Herbert, which the writer of the anonymous letter calls a *ſurpriſing incident*, and which is indeed of ſuch a nature, that I cannot paſs it by without a particular notice.

After having obſerved that Lord Herbert's tract *de Veritate* was his favourite work, he produceth a large extract relating to it, in that Lord's own words, ſignifying, that though it had been approved by ſome very learned men to whom he had ſhewn it, among whom he mentions Grotius, yet as the frame of his whole book was ſo different from what had been written heretofore on this ſubject, and he apprehended he ſhould meet with much oppoſition, he did conſider, whether it were not better for him for a while to ſuppreſs it. And then his Lordſhip proceeds thus:

"Being thus doubtful, in my chamber, one fair day in the "ſummer, my caſement being open towards the ſouth, the ſun

"ſhining

" ſhining clear, and no wind ſtirring, I took my book *de Veritate* " in my hands, and, kneeling on my knees, devoutly ſaid theſe " words. *O thou eternal God, author of this light which now* " *ſhines upon me, and giver of all inward illuminations; I do* " *beſeech thee, of thine infinite goodneſs, to pardon a greater re-* " *queſt than a ſinner ought to make; I am not ſatisfied enough,* " *whether I ſhall publiſh this book: if it be for thy glory, I be-* " *ſeech thee give me ſome ſign from heaven; if not, I ſhall ſuppreſs* " *it.* I had no ſooner ſpoken theſe words, but a loud, though " yet gentle noiſe, came forth from the heavens (for it was like " nothing on earth); which did ſo cheer and comfort me, that I " took my petition as granted, and that I had the ſign I demanded; " whereupon alſo I reſolved to print my book. This, how " ſtrange ſoever it may ſeem, I proteſt before the eternal God, " is true: neither am I any way ſuperſtitiouſly deceived herein; " ſince I did not only clearly hear the noiſe, but in the ſereneſt " ſky that ever I ſaw, being without all cloud, did, to my think- " king, ſee the place from whence it came."

The ingenious writer of the letter ſays, he will make no remarks on this incident, but ſends it as he finds it; but he makes no doubt, that ſome obſervations upon this and other things in that life would be acceptable to the friends of religion.

I ſhall mention ſome reflections that have occurred to me upon this occaſion.

I have no doubt of his Lordſhip's ſincerity in this account. The ſerious air with which he relates it, and the ſolemn proteſtation he makes, as in the preſence of the eternal God, will not ſuffer us to queſtion the truth of what he relates; *viz.* that he both made that addreſs to God which he mentions, and that, in conſequence of this, he was perſuaded that he heard the noiſe he takes notice of, and which he took to come from heaven, and regarded as a mark of God's approbation of the requeſt he had made: and accordingly this great man was determined by it to publiſh this book. He ſeems to have conſidered it as a kind of imprimatur given to it from heaven, and as ſignifying the divine approbation of the book itſelf, and of what was contained in it.

I cannot help thinking, that if any writer, zealous for Chriſtianity, had given ſuch an account of himſelf, as praying for and expecting a ſign from heaven to determine his doubt, whether

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he ſhould publiſh a book he had compoſed in favour of the chriſtian cauſe; and upon hearing a noiſe, which he took to be from heaven, had looked upon it as a mark of the divine approbation, and as a call to publiſh that book; it would have paſſed for a high fit of enthuſiaſm, and would no doubt have ſubjected the author to much ridicule among the gentlemen that oppoſe revealed religion. What judgment they will paſs upon it in Lord Herbert's caſe I do not know: but conſidering the great partiality they have often ſhewn in their own favour and againſt chriſtianity, it is not improbable, that ſome of them may be apt to interpret this incident as giving a divine ſanction to a book, which contains indeed ſeveral important truths, but withal hath ſome principles which are unfavourable to the chriſtian religion; or at leaſt, they may be willing to have it believed that this is as much to be depended upon as the ſigns and atteſtations ſaid to be given from heaven to the firſt preachers and publiſhers of the goſpel revelation.

There are ſome things obſervable in Lord Herbert's ſolemn addreſs to God which, I think, are highly commendable, and would incline one to think very favourably of his Lordſhip's intentions. He diſcovereth in it a great veneration for the Deity, and a deep ſenſe of his dependence upon him as the *author of light, and the giver of all inward illuminations.* This is agreeable to the ſentiments of the beſt and wiſeſt men in all ages; but yet I think it may be juſtly doubted, whether an addreſs of ſuch a particular kind as that made by his Lordſhip was proper or regular. It does not ſeem to me, that we are well founded to apply for or to expect an extraordinary ſign from heaven, for determining doubts concerning the expediency of publiſhing a book. Methinks, if a man hath uſed his beſt endeavours to find out truth, and (which certainly ought not to be neglected) hath humbly applied to God to aſſiſt and direct him in his inquiries; if he hath the teſtimony of his own conſcience to the uprightneſs of his own intentions, and that he is not actuated by pride and vain glory, by an affectation of ſingularity, or any worldly ſiniſter ends and views; and if he is ſatisfied, upon the moſt diligent and impartial examination, that what he hath advanced is both true and of great importance to mankind, and is only afraid of the oppoſition it may meet with; I think, in ſuch a caſe, eſpecially

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if he hath alſo the advice of good and judicious friends concerning it, he hath ſufficient grounds to proceed upon, and doth not need a particular ſign from heaven to determine him. This ſeems to be a putting it on a wrong foot, ſince God hath not in his word given us any ground to expect that he will anſwer ſuch a requeſt; nor is there any reaſon to expect it from the nature of the thing. His Lordſhip himſelf ſeems to have ſuſpected that ſuch an addreſs and expectation was not regular, when he begs of God to *pardon* it, as being a *greater requeſt than a ſinner ought to make.* I believe it will be acknowledged, that ſudden impreſſions, or ſuppoſed ſigns from heaven, like that upon which Lord Herbert ſeemeth to lay ſo great a ſtreſs, are very equivocal, and not much to be depended upon for information in truth, or direction in duty: They may lay perſons open to miſtake and deluſion. It cannot be denied, that, in ſuch caſes, men are in danger of being impoſed upon by the warmth of their own imaginations, eſpecially if they be wrought up to a ſtrong deſire and expectation of an extraordinary ſign from heaven, in favour of a deſign which they heartily wiſh ſhould ſucceed.

I think it is evident, from his own account of it, that this was Lord Herbert's caſe. His mind was full of his book, highly prepoſſeſſed in favour of its truth and uſefulneſs. He ſeems not to have been diffident of the truth and goodneſs of the book itſelf, but only to have been in doubt about the expediency of its publication; and he took a very extraordinary way to obtain direction concerning it. Nothing leſs would ſatisfy him than a ſign from heaven; and it is plain that he was big with expectation. His imagination was warmed with the hope of a ſign that ſhould be a mark of the divine approbation. It is not to be wondered at, that a mind thus prepared ſhould be diſpoſed to interpret any incident that ſhould happen, in favour of its own prepoſſeſſions, and as countenancing the purpoſe he had entertained in his own breaſt. Taking it in this view, nothing happened, but what may reaſonably enough be accounted for, without ſuppoſing any thing ſupernatural in the caſe. He doth not mention any articulate voice, or words ſpoken to him as from heaven, directing him what to do, or ſignifying an approbation of his deſign: he only maketh mention of a noiſe that ſeemed to him to come from heaven. He giveth no particular account what kind of noiſe it was, but only

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that it was *loud and yet gentle*, and that *it came from heaven, for it was like nothing on earth;* that it was in *a ſerene ſky*, and that, *to his thinking, he ſaw the place from whence it came.* In this ſituation of his mind, any noiſe that happened at that preciſe juncture, and which had ſomething unuſual in it (and it is eaſy to ſuppoſe ſeveral things of this kind), might be apt to make an impreſſion on his imagination. I ſhall only put one ſuppoſition, and it is this; that at that time it might happen to thunder at a diſtance, which might well be in ſummer-time, though in that part of the ſky which was within his view there was no cloud to be ſeen, and all ſeemed perfectly ſerene; and the "noiſe of thunder heard remote" (to uſe Milton's phraſe) coming at that inſtant when the ſoul was filled with expectation of ſomething extraordinary, would undoubtedly greatly affect him, and might be regarded as a ſign of approbation from heaven, which was what he ſought for: and then no wonder that it comforted and cheered him, as his Lordſhip obſerves it did.

It is, I muſt confeſs, a great ſatisfaction to me to reflect, that the evidence of the Chriſtian religion doth not depend upon ſuch equivocal ſigns as this. The atteſtations given to the firſt preachers and publiſhers of the goſpel were of ſuch a kind, that, ſuppoſing them to have really happened, they could not reaſonably, or with the leaſt appearance of probability, be aſcribed to any thing but a divine interpoſition; and therefore might juſtly be regarded as marks of the divine approbation of the Chriſtian ſcheme.

Upon this occaſion, I cannot help drawing ſome kind of parallel in my own mind, between this incident that happened to this noble Lord, and that extraordinary appearance from heaven which St. Paul gives an account of; and which, with what followed upon it, had ſuch an effect upon him, as to conquer his obſtinate prejudices, and to engage him to profeſs and preach that faith in Chriſt which he himſelf had zealouſly perſecuted before. I believe the warmeſt advocates for Chriſtianity would be ready to own, that if that great apoſtle had had no better account to give of the reaſons and motives of his converſion, than ſuch a ſign from heaven as Lord Herbert mentions, this would have been a very ſlender foundation either for himſelf or others to go upon, in receiving the Chriſtian doctrine as of divine original. But the

ſlighteſt compariſon of the caſes may let us ſee that there is a wide and amazing difference between them. Lord Herbert's mind was prepoſſeſſed with the expectation of a ſign from heaven: he ſought it, he applied to God for it, he had an hope that ſomething of this kind would happen: and when the thing came which he took for a ſign, it was in favour of what he no doubt ſtrongly wiſhed and deſired before: yet, prepoſſeſſed as his imagination was, he heard no voice of words, nor articulate language, ſignifying to him the divine will. But St. Paul was the fartheſt in the world from deſiring or expecting a ſign from heaven in favour of the religion of Jeſus: on the contrary, his mind was at that very inſtant wholly poſſeſſed with the ſtrongeſt prejudices againſt it. He was then going to Damaſcus, with a commiſſion from the high-prieſt to ſeize the diſciples of Jeſus, and bring them to Jeruſalem to be puniſhed; and he was perſuaded in his own conſcience that he was right in doing ſo. He *breathed out threatnings and ſlaughter* againſt them, as the ſacred writer expreſſeth it: and he himſelf tells us, that *he verily thought with himſelf, that he ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jeſus of Nazareth.* In this circumſtance of things, if we ſhould ſuppoſe him ſeized with a ſudden pang of enthuſiaſm, though this is by no means likely to have happened to him, as he was travelling along the road at noon-day, with ſeveral others in his company; but if we ſhould ſuppoſe that ſomething of this kind happened to him, and that he ſaw an extraordinary light from heaven, which he took to be a ſign that heaven approved the work in which he was then engaged; or if he had thought he alſo heard a voice from above ſpeaking to him, and animating him to go on, and courageouſly to execute the commiſſion he had received from the high-prieſt, and promiſing him ſucceſs in it; there might poſſibly be ſome pretence for aſcribing it to the working of an over-heated imagination, filled with the deſign he was upon, which engaged all his thoughts and reſolutions. But it is plain that, in the temper he was then in, he could not have the leaſt expectation of Jeſus of Nazareth's appearing to him with a celeſtial ſplendour and glory, calling to him with a majeſtic voice from heaven, and, in words which he diſtinctly heard, reproving him for his enmity to him, and perſecuting rage againſt his diſciples, appointing him his miniſter and apoſtle, and commiſſion-

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ing him to preach the goſpel to the Gentiles, and to invite them to a participation of the benefits and privileges of his kingdom; which were things the moſt remote from his apprehenſion that could poſſibly be conceived.

I need not here particularly repeat all the circumſtances of a ſtory ſo well known as that of the divine appearance which occaſioned St. Paul's converſion: but taking in the whole, as he himſelf relateth it, it is abſolutely impoſſible that it ſhould have been the effect of his own enthuſiaſtic imagination, conſidering how his mind was at that time diſpoſed: To which may be added the conſequent effects which ſhewed the reality of it. Struck blind with the glory of the appearance, he was obliged to be led to Damaſcus; and it was only by the laying on of Ananias' hands in the name of Jeſus, that he had his ſight reſtored. There was immediately a wonderful change in his diſpoſitions, notions, and inclinations. He became enlightened at once, without human inſtruction, in a perfect knowledge of the religion of Jeſus, than which nothing could be more contrary in many points to the phariſaical principles and prejudices he had ſo deeply imbibed. He was endued with the moſt extraordinary gifts of the Holy Ghoſt, and had a power of communicating thoſe gifts to others, by the laying on of his hands in the name of a crucified and riſen Jeſus; and in the ſame ſacred name was enabled to perform the moſt illuſtrious miracles. Theſe were matters of fact in which he could not be deceived himſelf, and of which there were numbers of witneſſes: and accordingly he went through the nations preaching Jeſus Chriſt, and him crucified, as the Saviour and Lord; which he did with ſuch evidence, and had ſuch extraordinary atteſtations from heaven accompanying him, that vaſt numbers were brought over by his miniſtry to embrace a religion which was abſolutely contrary to their moſt rooted prejudices, inclinations, and intereſts.

There might poſſibly be ſome ſuſpicions with regard to the relation of a fact ſo circumſtanced as was that of Lord Herbert. It might be thought poſſible, that an author might feign an approbation from heaven in favour of ſome peculiar notions he had entertained, and of a book of which he was very fond, and upon which he ſeems to have valued himſelf: not that I think there is any reaſonable ground of ſuſpicion, that this noble writer feigned what

what he relates concerning this incident; but yet ſome may ſuppoſe, that an author might poſſibly be under ſome temptation to deviate from the rules of truth in ſuch a caſe. But no ſuch ſuſpicion can be entertained in St. Paul's caſe, that he ſhould have feigned a heavenly appearance in favour of a religion which he was well known to have hated, perſecuted, and deſpiſed, and which was abſolutely contrary to the prejudices to which he had been ſo obſtinately addicted, and to all his worldly expectations, connections, and intereſts: to which it may be added, that he gave the higheſt poſſible proof of his own ſincere belief of the fact as he has related it, by his inviolable adherence to that religion to which he was by this extraordinary means converted; that he expoſed himſelf by it to the different perſecutions, and to the greateſt and moſt various labours and ſufferings that any one man ever endured; and which he bore with an invincible conſtancy, and even with a divine exultation and joy, ſupported by the teſtimony of a good conſcience, and the hope of a glorious reward in the heavenly world.

Upon the whole, let us put the ſuppoſition, that Lord Herbert, in the account he hath given of what happened to him, has had the ſtricteſt regard to truth (which, for my part, I have no doubt of), and that the account St. Paul hath given of the extraordinary appearance to him from heaven is alſo true, there is this vaſt difference between the caſes: that, granting all that happened to Lord Herbert to have been as he relates it, there is nothing in it but what may be accounted for in ſome ſuch manner as that mentioned above, without ſuppoſing any thing ſupernatural in the caſe; but, granting the truth of the relation which St. Paul gives of the divine appearance to him, with the effects that followed upon it, there is no poſſibility of accounting for it in a natural way, or indeed in any other manner than by owning an extraordinary and ſupernatural interpoſition. Though therefore the former, granting it to be true, can by no means be depended upon as a certain mark of the approbation of heaven given to Lord Herbert's book; yet the latter, ſuppoſing it in like manner true, affordeth a convincing proof of an extraordinary atteſtation given from heaven to the divine miſſion and glory of a crucified Jeſus, and to the truth and divine original of the Chriſtian revelation.

I may perhaps be thought to have expatiated too much in my

reflections on this occaſion; but I hope I ſhall be excuſed when it is conſidered, that the incident is of ſo uncommon a nature; that it relateth to a perſon of Lord Herbert's character and eminence; and that the account of it is extracted from memorials written by himſelf.

I ſhall make no farther remarks on the anonymous letter, than to obſerve, that the writer of it makes mention of the anſwers to Lord Herbert, publiſhed by Mr. Baxter and Mr. Halyburton. He alſo takes notice of the Weekly Miſcellany, as having lately appeared againſt him. The two former I have taken notice of above; the latter I have not ſeen, and therefore know not how far ſome of the obſervations there made may have coincided with mine.

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LETTER III.

Obſervations on Mr. Hobbes's Writings—He ſometimes profeſſeth a Regard to the Scripture as the Word and Law of God; at other times ridicules Inſpiration or Revelation—He attempts to invalidate the ſacred Canon, and makes Religion and the Authority of Scripture to depend entirely on the Authority of the Magiſtrate—His ſtrange Maxims in Morality and Politics—His Scheme tends to ſubvert Natural Religion as well as Revealed—Confuted by ſeveral learned Authors.

SIR,

IN my two former letters ſome obſervations were made on the writings of that eminent deiſt, Lord Herbert of Cherbury. The next writer I ſhall mention was in ſeveral reſpects of a different character from that noble Lord, though alſo very famous in his time, the noted Mr Thomas Hobbes of Malmſbury. There have been few perſons whoſe writings have had a more pernicious influence in ſpreading irreligion and infidelity than his; yet as none of his treatiſes are directly levelled againſt revealed religion, I ſhall content myſelf with ſome brief general reflections upon them. He ſometimes affects to ſpeak with veneration of the ſacred writings. He expreſsly declareth, that though the laws of nature are not laws as they proceed from nature, yet, "as "they are given by God in holy ſcripture, they are properly call-"ed laws; for the holy ſcripture is the voice of God, ruling all "things by the greateſt right*." But though he ſeems here to make the laws of ſcripture to be the laws of God, and to derive their force from his ſupreme authority, yet in many other paſſages, ſome of which I ſhall have occaſion to mention, he ſuppoſeth them to have no authority but what they derive from the prince or civil power. He ſometimes ſeems to acknowledge inſpiration to be a ſupernatural gift, and the immediate hand of God; at other times he treats the pretence to it as a ſign of madneſs; and, by a jingle upon the words, repreſents God's ſpeaking

* De Cive, cap. iii. ſect. 33.

to the ancient prophets in a dream or viſion, to be no more than their dreaming that he ſpoke to them, or *dreaming between ſleeping and waking**. To weaken the authority of the ſacred Canon, he endeavours to ſhew, that the books of Moſes, and the hiſtorical writings of the Old Teſtament, were not written by thoſe whoſe names they bear, and that they are derived to us from no other authority but that of Eſdras, who reſtored them when they were loſt†: a ſuppoſition in which he hath been ſince followed by others on the ſame ſide, and very lately by a noble Lord; though the abſurdity of it is manifeſt, and hath been fully expoſed‡. As to the writings of the New Teſtament, he acknowledgeth, that they are as ancient as the times of the apoſtles, and that they were written by perſons who lived in thoſe times, ſome of whom ſaw the things which they relate; which is what many of our modern deiſts ſeem unwilling to own. And though he inſinuates that the copies of the ſcriptures were but few, and only in the hands of the Eccleſiaſtics, yet he adds, that he ſees no reaſon to doubt, but that the books of the New Teſtament, as we have them, are the true regiſters of thoſe things which were done and ſaid by the prophets and apoſtles§. But then he moſt abſurdly pretends, that they were not received as of divine authority in the Chriſtian church, till they were declared to be ſo by the council of Laodicea, in the year after Chriſt 364: though nothing is capable of a clearer proof, than that their authority was acknowledged among Chriſtians from the apoſtolic times.

He expreſsly aſſerts, that we have no aſſurance of the certainty of ſcripture, but the *authority of the church*, and this he reſolveth into the *authority of the commonwealth:* and declares, that till the ſovereign ruler had preſcribed them, "the precepts of ſcripture were not obligatory laws, but only counſel and advice, "which he that was counſelled might without injuſtice refuſe to "obſerve, and being contrary to the laws could not without in-"juſtice obſerve;" that the word of the interpreter of ſcripture is the word of God, and the ſovereign magiſtrate is the interpreter of ſcripture, and of all doctrines, to whoſe authority we muſt

* Leviath. p. 196. † Ibid. p. 200, 201, 203.
‡ Reflections on Lord Bolingbroke's Letters, p. 51, &c.
§ Leviath. p. 204.

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ſtand*. Yea, he carrieth it ſo far as to pronounce, that Chriſtians are bound in conſcience to obey the laws of an infidel king in matters of religion; that "thought is free; but when it comes "to confeſſion of faith, the private reaſon muſt ſubmit to the "public, that is to ſay, to God's lieutenant." And accordingly, he alloweth the ſubject, being commanded by the ſovereign, to deny Chriſt in words, holding firmly in his heart the faith of Chriſt: and that in that caſe, "it is not he that denieth Chriſt "before men, but his governor and the laws of his country†." And he expreſsly declareth, that idolatry to which a man is compelled by the terror of death is not idolatry. And this being the caſe, it is not to be wondered at, that he ſpeaks with contempt of the ancient martyrs. In this the ſucceeding deiſts have not failed to imitate him. They have reproached thoſe excellent perſons as having *died as a fool dieth*‡; as if it were a ridiculous and ſenſeleſs thing to endure hardſhips and ſufferings, for the ſake of truth and conſcience: and yet thoſe have been always juſtly admired, who have expoſed themſelves to the greateſt dangers in a noble cauſe, and who would not do a baſe thing to ſave their lives.

Mr. Hobbes acknowledgeth the exiſtence of God, and that we muſt of neceſſity ariſe from the effects which we behold, to the eternal Power of all powers, and Cauſe of all cauſes; and he blames thoſe as abſurd who call the world, or the ſoul of the world, God: but he denies that we know any more of him than that he exiſts, and ſeems plainly to make him corporeal; for he affirms, that that which is not body is nothing at all§: and though he ſometimes ſeems to acknowledge religion and its obligations, and that there is an honour and worſhip due to God, prayer, thankſgivings, oblations, &c. yet he advanceth principles which evidently tend to ſubvert all religion. The account he gives of it is this, "that from the fear of power inviſible, feigned by the "mind, or imagined from tales publicly allowed, ariſeth religion, "not allowed ſuperſtition." And he elſewhere reſolveth religion into things which he himſelf derides; *viz.* "opinions of

* See Queſt. concerning Liberty, p. 136. De Cive, c. 17. Leviath. p. 169. 283, 284.

† Ibid. p. 238. 271.

‡ See Chriſt. not founded on Argument, p. 32, 33.

§ Leviath. p. 214. 371.

" ghoſts, ignorance of ſecond cauſes, devotion to what men fear, " and taking of things caſual for prognoſtics*." He takes pains in many of his works to prove man to be a neceſſary agent, and expreſsly aſſerts the materiality and mortality of the human ſoul; and he repreſents the doctrine concerning the diſtinction between ſoul and body in man to be an error contracted by the contagion of the demonology of the Greeks. We may obſerve by the way the great difference there is in this reſpect between Mr. Hobbes and Lord Herbert. This noble writer has reckoned the notion and belief of a future ſtate among the common notices naturally obvious to the minds of all men: but the account Mr. Hobbes is pleaſed to give of it is this, that the belief of a future ſtate after death " is a belief grounded upon other men's ſaying, that they " knew it ſupernaturally, or that they knew thoſe, that knew " them, that knew others, that knew it ſupernaturally †."

That we may have the better notion of this extraordinary writer, it may not be amiſs to mention ſome other of his maxims. He aſſerts, that by the law of nature every man hath a right to all things, and over all perſons, and that the natural condition of man is a ſtate of war, a war of all men againſt all men: that there is no way ſo reaſonable for any man as to anticipate, that is, by force and wiles to maſter all the perſons of others that he can, ſo long till he ſees no other power great enough to endanger him; that the civil laws are the only rules of good and evil, juſt and unjuſt, honeſt and diſhoneſt; and that antecedently to ſuch laws every action is in its own nature indifferent: that there is nothing good or evil in itſelf, nor any common laws conſtituting what is naturally juſt and unjuſt; that all things are meaſured by what every man judgeth fit, where there is no civil government, and by the laws of ſociety where there is one ‡. That the power of the ſovereign is abſolute, and that he is not bound by any compacts with his ſubjects: that nothing the ſovereign can do to the ſubject can properly be called injurious or wrong; and that the king's word is ſufficient to take any thing from any ſubject, if there be need, and the king is judge of that need §.

* Leviath. p. 54. † Ibid. p. 74.

‡ De Cive, c. vi. ſ. 18. c. x. ſ. 1. c. 12. ſ. 1. Leviath. p. 24, 25. 60, 61, 62, 63. 72.

§ Leviath. p. 90. 106.

In

In Mr. Hobbes we have a remarkable inſtance what ſtrange extravagancies men of wit and genius may fall into, who, whilſt they value themſelves upon their ſuperior penetration, and laugh at popular errors and ſuperſtition, often give into notions ſo wild and ridiculous, as none of the people that govern themſelves by plain common ſenſe could be guilty of. It will hardly be thought too ſevere a cenſure to ſay, that Mr. Hobbes's ſcheme ſtrikes at the foundation of all religion, both natural and revealed: that it tendeth not only to ſubvert the authority of the ſcripture, but to deſtroy God's moral adminiſtration: that it confoundeth the natural differences of good and evil, virtue and vice, and taketh away the diſtinction between ſoul and body, and the liberty of human actions: that it deſtroyeth the beſt principles of the human nature, and, inſtead of that innate benevolence and ſocial diſpoſition which ſhould unite men together, ſuppoſeth all men to be naturally in a ſtate of war with one another: that it erecteth an abſolute tyranny in the ſtate and church, which it confounds, and maketh the will of the prince or governing power the ſole ſtandard of right and wrong; and that it deſtroyeth all the rights of private conſcience, and indeed leaveth no room for conſcience at all.

But notwithſtanding the ill tendency of many of Mr. Hobbes's principles, yet the agreeableneſs of his ſtile, of which he was a great maſter, joined to his dogmatical way of pronouncing with a very deciſive air, and the very oddneſs and apparent novelty of his notions, gave them a great run for a time, and did no ſmall miſchief. He himſelf boaſteth of the good reception his *Leviathan* met with among many of our gentry: but the manifold abſurdities and inconſiſtencies of his ſcheme, and the pernicious conſequences of it to religion, morality, and the civil government, have been ſo well expoſed, and ſet in ſo clear a light, that there are not many of our modern deiſts that would be thought openly to eſpouſe his ſyſtem in its full extent: though indeed it cannot be denied, that there are not a few things in their writings borrowed from his, and that ſome of them have choſen rather to follow him than Lord Herbert in ſeveral of his principles, and particularly in aſſerting the materiality and mortality of the human ſoul, and denying man's free agency.

Mr. Hobbes met with many learned adverſaries, among whom

we may particularly reckon Dr. Seth Ward, afterwards biſhop of Saliſbury, and archbiſhop Bramhal. The latter argued with great acuteneſs againſt that part of his ſcheme which relates to liberty and neceſſity, and afterwards attacked the whole of his ſyſtem, in a piece called the *Catching of the Leviathan*, publiſhed at London in 1658; in which he undertakes to demonſtrate, out of Mr. Hobbes's own works, that no man who is thoroughly an *Hobbiſt* can be "a good Chriſtian, or a good commonwealth's "man, or reconcile himſelf to himſelf." The reverend Mr. Teniſon, afterwards archbiſhop of Canterbury, gave a ſummary view of Mr. Hobbes's principles, with a judicious confutation of them, in a book called *The Creed of Mr. Hobbes examined*, publiſhed in 1670. To theſe may be added, the famous Earl of Clarendon, who wrote *A brief View and Survey of the dangerous and pernicious Errors to the Church and State in Mr. Hobbes's Book, entitled* "*Leviathan.*" This was publiſhed in 1676. Biſhop Parker, Mr. Tyrrel, but, above all, Biſhop Cumberland, in his juſtly celebrated work *de Legibus Naturæ*, did alſo diſtinguiſh themſelves in this controverſy. It is to be obſerved, that the learned writers who oppoſed Mr. Hobbes did not ſo much apply themſelves to vindicate revealed religion, or the Chriſtian ſyſtem, as to eſtabliſh the great principles of all religion and morality, which his ſcheme tended to ſubvert: and to ſhew, that they had a real foundation in reaſon and nature. In this they certainly did good ſervice to religion: yet ſome of the enemies of revelation endeavoured to take advantage of it, as if this ſhewed that there is no other religion but the law of nature, and that any extraordinary revelation is needleſs and uſeleſs. Thus, on every ſuppoſition, theſe gentlemen ſeem reſolved to carry their cauſe againſt Chriſtianity. If there be no law of nature, no real difference, in the nature of things, between moral good and evil, virtue and vice, there is no ſuch thing as religion at all, and conſequently no Chriſtian religion. On the other hand, if it be proved that there is ſuch a thing as the religion and law of nature, which is founded in the very nature and relations of things, and agreeable to right reaſon, then it is concluded, that this alone is ſufficient, and that it is clear and obvious to all mankind, and therefore they need no revelation to inſtruct them in it, or aſſure them of it. A very wrong concluſion this! ſince it is manifeſt that

that a well-atteſted revelation from God would be of very great uſe, both farther to clear and confirm ſome of the important principles of natural religion, which, though in themſelves reaſonable, were in fact greatly obſcured and perverted in the corrupt ſtate of mankind; and alſo to inſtruct men in things which, however highly uſeful to be known, they could not have clearly diſcovered or been fully aſſured of, by the mere unaſſiſted light of nature, without a divine revelation.

This might lead one into a train of reflections on the connection there is between natural and revealed religion: but I muſt content myſelf with giving ſhort hints of things: to enlarge farther upon them would not ſuit my preſent deſign. You will probably hear from me again ſoon: and in the mean time, I am, &c.

LETTER IV.

Mr. Charles Blount's Notes on the Life of Apollonius Tyanæus, deſigned to expoſe Chriſtianity—His Religio Laici *copied, for the moſt Part, from Lord Herbert—He had a chief Hand in the* Oracles of Reaſon—*He attacks the Doctrine of a Mediator, as unworthy of God—His remarkable Conceſſion, that it is not ſafe to truſt to Deiſm alone, without Chriſtianity joined with it.——Mr. Toland, another deiſtical Writer; very fond of aſſerting Paradoxes—The Deſign of his* Amyntor *to render the Canon of the New Teſtament uncertain—He gives a large Catalogue of ſpurious Goſpels, and attempts to ſhew that they were equally received and acknowledged in the primitive Times, with the Goſpels which are now looked upon as authentic—The contrary fully proved in the Anſwers that were made to him.*

SIR,

AMONG thoſe who openly avowed the cauſe of deiſm, and ſeemed zealous to promote it, may be reckoned Charles Blount, Eſq. In 1680 he publiſhed a tranſlation of the two firſt books of Philoſtratus's Life of Apollonius Tyanæus, with large notes, which are manifeſtly intended to ſtrike at revealed religion. Apollonius, you know, was a Pythagorean philoſopher that lived in the firſt century, whoſe character and miracles were oppoſed by the pagans to thoſe of our Lord Jeſus Chriſt. Hierocles wrote a book to this purpoſe, which was anſwered by Euſebius, who hath plainly proved, that Philoſtratus was a vain and fabulous writer, and that his accounts are full of romantic ſtories and ridiculous fables: and whoever impartially conſiders Philoſtratus's book, which is ſtill extant, muſt be convinced that Euſebius's cenſure upon it is juſt. Nothing can be ſuppoſed more different than Philoſtratus's manner of writing, ſtuffed with rhetorical flouriſhes and vain oſtentations of learning, is from the plain, ſober, artleſs narration of the evangeliſts, which hath all the characters of genuine unaffected ſimplicity, and a ſincere regard to truth: To which it may be added, that Apollonius's philoſophy, and the wonders he is ſaid to have wrought, all tended to uphold the reigning

reigning eſtabliſhed ſuperſtition and idolatry, which at the ſame time had all worldly advantages on its ſide, and yet was not able to oppoſe the progreſs of Chriſtianity, which triumphed over it, though deſtitute of all thoſe advantages, and though it had all the powers of the world againſt it:—a manifeſt proof this, how vaſtly ſuperior the evidence of our Saviour's divine character and miracles was to any thing that could be produced in oppoſition to it! And yet many of our modern deiſts have been fond of running the parallel between Apollonius and Jeſus Chriſt. Mr. Blount, in his notes, has thrown out ſeveral inſinuations againſt the miracles of our Saviour, in which he has been followed and even exceeded by ſome ſucceeding writers, of whom I may afterwards give ſome account. This gentleman has on ſeveral occaſions diſcovered a ſtrong prejudice againſt the ſcriptures, and ſhewn how willing he is to lay hold on whatſoever he thinks may expoſe them: it could be only owing to this, that he finds fault with that manner of expreſſion, *he opened his mouth, and ſaid**; a cenſure which may be thought to proceed from an extraordinary nicety, rather than a true juſtneſs of taſte. But though this, and other oriental idioms and forms of ſpeech, may differ from what is uſual among us, the language of ſcripture has been always admired by the beſt judges.

In 1683 the ſame gentleman publiſhed a ſmall book intitled *Religio Laici*, which is little more than a tranſlation of Lord Herbert's treatiſe of the ſame name. The additions and improvements he has made are ſo few, and of ſuch ſmall moment, as not to deſerve a diſtinct conſideration, and therefore I ſhall refer to the reflections already made on Lord Herbert's ſcheme.

Some years after, in 1693, there was another book publiſhed, in which Mr. Blount had a principal concern, and which was plainly intended to propagate infidelity. It had a pompous title, *The Oracles of Reaſon*, and was publiſhed after Mr. Blount's unhappy end, by his friend Mr. Charles Gildon, who uſhered it into the world by a preface in defence of ſelf-murder, which that gentleman had been guilty of, to get rid of the uneaſineſs of a paſſion which proved too violent for him. The title of the book ſeemed to promiſe demonſtration, as if it were intended to ſerve

* Blount's Notes on Philoſtratus, p. 69.

as

as an infallible guide in matters of religion: but there is little order or method in it, or regularity of deſign. It is a collection of different pieces, conſiſting for the moſt part of letters between Mr. Blount and his friends, intermixed with fragments and tranſlations from ſome Greek and Latin authors, done with no great exactneſs.

That part of the book which relates to natural religion and its ſufficiency, proceeds chiefly upon Lord Herbert's plan. There are two of the tracts particularly remarkable this way: the one is *A Summary Account of the Deiſt's Religion*, by Mr. Blount: the other is a letter from A. W. to Mr. Blount, concerning natural religion, as oppoſed to divine revelation. In the former of theſe, Mr Blount, having ſet himſelf to ſhew that God is not to be worſhipped by an image or by ſacrifices, next endeavoureth to prove that he is not to be worſhipped by a mediator. He pretends that the worſhip of God by a mediator derogateth from his infinite mercy, equally as an image doth from his ſpirituality and infinity.

But his argument is founded upon a miſapprehenſion or miſrepreſentation of the goſpel ſcheme. Far from derogating from the mercy or goodneſs of God, the appointment of ſuch a mediator as the goſpel propoſeth is one of the moſt ſignal inſtances of his grace and goodneſs towards mankind: It is a wiſe and gracious proviſion for exerciſing his mercy towards guilty creatures, in ſuch a way as is moſt becoming his own glorious government and perfections, and moſt conducive to their peace and comfort, and moſt proper to remove their guilty jealouſies and fears.

But he farther urgeth, that if God appointed the mediator, this ſhews that he was really reconciled to the world before, and conſequently that there was no need of a mediator. It ſheweth indeed that God had kind thoughts of mercy, and gracious intentions towards the human race; but this doth not prove that therefore the appointment of a mediator was needleſs. On the contrary, his wiſdom determined him to take this method as the propereſt way of exerciſing his mercy, and diſpenſing the effects of his goodneſs; of which he is certainly the fitteſt judge: And whoſoever duly conſiders the ſublime idea given us in the goſpel of the mediator, the work upon which he was ſent, and the offices he was inveſted with, may obſerve ſuch characters of the divine wiſdom and goodneſs in it, ſuch a regard to the honour of God,

God, and to the comfort and benefit and happineſs of mankind, as ought greatly to recommend the goſpel ſcheme. But the diſtinct conſideration of theſe things would take up more room than the preſent deſign will allow.

To this tract is prefixed a letter from Mr. Blount to Dr. Sydenham, in which there is this remarkable paſſage: that "undoubtedly, in our travels to the other world, the common "road is the ſafeſt; and though deiſm is a good manuring of a "man's conſcience, yet certainly, if ſowed with Chriſtianity, it "will produce the moſt plentiful crop." Here he ſeems plainly to own, that it is not ſafe to truſt to deiſm alone, if Chriſtianity be not joined with it*.

As to the other tract I mentioned, the letter written by A. W. to Mr. Blount, concerning natural religion as oppoſed to divine revelation, the chief heads of natural religion are there reduced to ſeven articles. 1. That there is an infinite and eternal God, creator of all things. 2. That he governs the world by his providence. 3. That it is our duty to worſhip and obey him as our creator and governor. 4. That our worſhip conſiſts in prayer to him, and praiſe of him. 5. That our obedience conſiſts in the rules of right reaſon, the practice of which is moral virtue. 6. That we are to expect rewards and puniſhments hereafter according to our actions in this life, which includes the ſoul's immortality, and is proved by our admitting providence. 7. That when we err from the rules of our duty, we ought to repent, and truſt in God's mercy for pardon†. Here Lord Herbert's five articles, which were all that he accounted neceſſary, are enlarged to ſeven, which indeed may be regarded as farther explications of the former: and with other explications they might be enlarged to a ſtill greater number. What was obſerved concerning Lord Herbert's articles may be applied to theſe. It will be acknowledged, that they are agreeable to right reaſon; but this is no proof that therefore an expreſs divine revelation would not be needful, in the preſent ſtate of mankind, to ſet them in a ſtronger light, and give them additional force. Several of the deiſts would be far from agreeing with this writer in ſome of the articles he mentions. The firſt article runs thus, that *there is*

* Oracles of Reaſon, p. 87. 91. † Ibid. p. 197.

one

one eternal self-existent God, creator of all things; where it is plainly supposed, that the world was created; and yet in another part of that book, Mr. Blount has taken the pains to translate a large fragment of Ocellus Lucanus, which is designed to prove the eternity of the world*: and it appears that he himself does not disapprove it. In another part of these pretended *Oracles*, in a letter from Mr. Gildon to Mr. Blount, the opinion of the origin of good and evil, from two different eternal principles, the one good, the other evil, is represented as not unreasonable†. In another of the above-mentioned seven articles it is declared, that the *worship we owe to God consists in prayer to Him, and praise of Him:* and yet it is well known, that this has been contested and denied by some of the ancient philosophers and modern deists; and Mr. Blount himself, in his notes upon the Life of Apollonius Tyanæus, having observed that some of the heathens used no prayers at all, insinuates, in their names, objections against that duty‡. With regard to the fifth article, that *our obedience consists in the rules of right reason, the practice whereof is moral virtue*, this is easily said in general; but there is no great likelihood, that, if they were to come to a particular explication, they would agree what is to be looked upon as included in the rules of right reason, and in the practice of moral virtue. Some of them would probably think it reasonable to indulge the appetites and passions in instances which others would not think reasonable or proper: even in a point of such consequence as self-murder, some of the ancient philosophers and modern deists have pleaded for it, whilst others have condemned it; and it is openly justified (as was before observed) in the preface to these *Oracles of Reason*. One should therefore think no reasonable man could deny, that express precepts, determining by a divine authority the particulars of moral duty, would be of great advantage. As to the article of future rewards and punishments, and the soul's immortality, this is represented by Mr. Blount, in a letter *to the right honourable the* most *ingenious* Strephon, and by A. W. in his letter to Mr. Blount, as a necessary part of natural religion; and yet he observes, that the ancient heathens dis-

* Oracles of Reason, p. 212—228.

† Ibid. p. 194.

‡ Notes on Philostratus, p. 38.

agreed

agreed about it *. In another part of theſe *Oracles*, it is declared to be probable, that the ſoul of man is not of an entirely diſtinct nature from the body, but only a purer material compoſition †. Now the ſoul's materiality is not very conſiſtent with the doctrine of its immortality: and from this we may judge of A. W's argument againſt Chriſtianity, that "if the reaſons of the Chriſtian religion were evident, there would be no longer any contention or difference about it: and if all do not agree in it, "thoſe marks of truth in it are not viſible, which are neceſſary "to draw our aſſent ‡." This argument, if it were good for any thing, would prove that there are no viſible marks of truth in natural religion, no more than in revealed; ſince it cannot be denied that men differ about the one as well as the other: but the truth is, the argument doth not conclude in either caſe.

There are ſeveral things in the *Oracles of Reaſon* which are particularly deſigned againſt the holy ſcriptures, and which have been repeated by others ſince: but the ſacred writings have been fully vindicated againſt thoſe exceptions. Mr. Blount has particularly attacked the writings of Moſes, and the moſt conſiderable part of what he has offered to this purpoſe is borrowed either from the learned author of the *Archæologiæ Philoſophicæ*, who, though he differed in ſome things from what is generally looked upon as the true interpretation of Moſes's ſenſe, was far from intending to ſubvert the authority of the Moſaic writings; or from the author of the hypotheſis of the *Pre-Adamites*, who afterwards retracted his own book. From this writer Mr. Blount hath given us a literal tranſlation for ſeveral pages together, in different parts of this book, without making the leaſt acknowledgment of it, or taking any notice of the anſwers that had been returned. In like manner he hath thought proper to repeat the objections which have been frequently urged againſt the Moſaic writings, from the irreconcilableneſs of the accounts there given with the antiquities pretended to by the moſt learned heathen nations, particularly the Chaldeans and Egyptians. Our great Stillingfleet had, in the firſt book of his *Origines Sacræ*, very amply conſidered that matter, and clearly ſhewn the vanity of thoſe pretences; yet they are here again advanced with as much

* Oracles of Reaſon, p. 201. † Ibid. p. 154. 187. ‡ Ibid. p. 201. 206.

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confidence as if they had never been refuted. The ſame obſervation may be made with regard to the arguments of Ocellus Lucanus about the eternity of the world, which are tranſlated and produced with great pomp by Mr. Blount, though they had been unanſwerably expoſed in the laſt-mentioned learned treatiſe*.

The *Oracles of Reaſon* were animadverted upon by Mr. John Bradley, in a book publiſhed at London in 1699, in 12mo. intitled, *An Impartial View of the Truth of Chriſtianity, with the Hiſtory of the Life and Miracles of Apollonius Tyanæus: To which are added, ſome Reflections on a Book called "Oracles of Reaſon."* This book I have not ſeen. Dr. Nichols's *Conference with a Theiſt* was alſo particularly deſigned by the learned and ingenious author in oppoſition to the *Oracles of Reaſon;* and he hath not left any material part of that book unanſwered. The firſt part of this *Conference* was publiſhed at London in 12mo. in 1696, and the other three parts in the following years. But what deſerveth our ſpecial notice, Mr. Gildon, the publiſher of the *Oracles of Reaſon*, and who had recommended them to the world with a pompous eulogium, was afterwards, upon mature conſideration, convinced of his error; of which he gave a remarkable proof, in a good book which he publiſhed ſome years after, in 1705, intitled *The Deiſt's Manual.* It is obſervable, that the greateſt part of this book is taken up in vindicating the doctrines of the exiſtence and attributes of God, his providence and government of the world, the immortality of the ſoul, and a future ſtate: and his reaſon for it was, as he himſelf intimates, becauſe many of the deiſts, with whom he was well acquainted, did really deny thoſe great principles which lie at the foundation of all religion, or at leaſt repreſented them as doubtful and uncertain; and their not admitting natural religion in its juſt extent formed ſome of their principal prejudices againſt the chriſtian revelation.

The next writer of whom I ſhall give ſome account is Mr. Toland, who, though he called himſelf a chriſtian, made it very much the buſineſs of his life to ſerve the cauſe of infidelity, and to unſettle men's minds with regard to religion. There are many things in his writings which ſhew, that he was very fond of aſſerting things that had an appearance of novelty, however deſtitute

* Origines Sacræ, book iii. c. 2. ſ. 4, 5, 6, 7.

of

of reaſon or probability; a remarkable inſtance of which he has given, in his ſtrange attempt to prove that motion is eſſential to matter. See his letters to *Serena*, Letter III.*. In another book, which he calls *Pantheiſticon*, publiſhed in 1720, he has ſhewn himſelf a favourer and admirer of the *Pantheiſtic* philoſophy, *i. e.* that of Spinoſa, which acknowledgeth no other God but the univerſe. The firſt thing that made Mr. Toland taken notice of, was his *Chriſtianity not myſterious; or, a Diſcourſe ſhewing, that there is Nothing in the Goſpel contrary to Reaſon, nor above it, and that no Chriſtian Doctrine can be properly called a myſtery*. This was publiſhed in 1696, and was animadverted upon by ſeveral writers of learning and reputation, as Mr. Beeconſal, Mr. Beverly, Mr. John Norris, Dr. Payne, Mr. Synge, afterwards archbiſhop of Tuam, and Mr. Brown, afterwards biſhop of Cork. In 1709 he publiſhed at the Hague two Latin diſſertations. The firſt is intitled, *Adeiſidæmon, ſive Titus Livius a ſuperſtitione vindicatus. In qua diſſertatione probatur Livium hiſtoricum in ſacris, prodigiis, et oſtentis enarrandis, haudquaquam fuiſſe credulum aut ſuperſtitioſum: ipſamque ſuperſtitionem non minus Reipublicæ (ſi non magis) exitioſam eſſe, quam purum putum atheiſmum*. The ſecond diſſertation bears the title of *Origines Judaicæ, ſive Strabonis de Moſe et religione Judaica hiſtoria breviter illuſtrata*. In this diſſertation he ſeems to prefer the account of this pagan author concerning Moſes and the Jewiſh religion, before that which is given by the Jews themſelves. Theſe two diſſertations were anſwered by Mr. la Faye, miniſter at Utrecht, in a book printed in 1709, and intitled, *Defenſio religionis, nec non Moſis et gentis Judaicæ, contra duas diſſertationes Joannis Tolandi*; and by Mr. Benoit, miniſter at Delft, in his *Mélange de remarques critiques, hiſtoriques, philoſophiques, théologiques, ſur les deux diſſertations de Mr. Toland, intitulées, l'un l'Homme ſans ſuperſtition, et l'autre les origines Judaïques*, printed at Delft in 1712. But what I ſhall here particularly take notice of, and by which he hath chiefly diſtinguiſhed himſelf, is the pains he hath taken to invalidate the authority of the ſacred Canon of the New Teſtament, and to render it uncertain and precarious. This ſeems to have been the deſign of

* This is confuted in Dr. Clarke's Demonſtration, &c. p. 24. Edit. 7th.

the book he calls *Amyntor*, which he publiſhed in 1698, and in which he hath given a catalogue of books; attributed in the primitive times to Jeſus Chriſt, his apoſtles, and other eminent perſons, "together with remarks and obſervations relating to the Canon of Scripture." He hath there raked together whatever he could find relating to the ſpurious goſpels, and pretended ſacred books, which appeared in the early ages of the Chriſtian church. Theſe he hath produced with great pomp, to the number of eighty and upwards; and though they were moſt of them evidently falſe and ridiculous, and carried the plaineſt marks of forgery and impoſture, of which, no doubt, he was very ſenſible, yet he has done what he could to repreſent them as of equal authority with the four goſpels, and other ſacred books of the New Teſtament, now received among Chriſtians. To this end he has taken advantage of the unwary and ill-grounded hypotheſes of ſome learned men, and has endeavoured to prove, that the books of the preſent Canon lay concealed in the coffers of private perſons till the latter times of Trajan or Adrian, and were not known to the clergy or churches of thoſe times, nor diſtinguiſhed from the ſpurious works of heretics; and that the ſcriptures which we now receive as canonical, and others which we now reject, were indifferently and promiſcuouſly cited and appealed to by the moſt ancient Chriſtian writers. His deſign in all this manifeſtly is to ſhew, that the goſpels, and other ſacred writings of the New Teſtament, now acknowledged as canonical, really deſerve no greater credit, and are no more to be depended upon, than thoſe books which are rejected and exploded as forgeries: and yet he had the confidence to pretend, in a book he afterwards publiſhed, that his intention in his *Amyntor* was not to invalidate, but to illuſtrate and confirm, the Canon of the New Teſtament*. This may ſerve as one inſtance, among the many that might be produced, of the writer's ſincerity.

* See Toland's preface to his *Nazarenus*, p. 9. This very odd book was well anſwered by Mr. (afterwards) Dr. Mangey, in his *Remarks upon Nazarenus*; on which Mr. Toland made ſome reflections, in a Tract he called *Mangoneutes*. Mr. Paterſon alſo publiſhed his *Anti-Nazarenus*, in anſwer to Mr. Toland's book. And Dr. Thomas Brett took ſome notice of it, in the Preface to his *Tradition neceſſary to explain and interpret the Holy Scriptures*.

Several

Several good anſwers were returned to Toland's *Amyntor*. Mr. (afterwards) Dr. Samuel Clarke publiſhed a ſmall tract in 1699, intitled, *Some Reflections on that Part of the Book called "Amyntor," which relates to the Writings of the primitive Fathers, and the Canon of the New Teſtament.* In this he gave an early ſpecimen of thoſe talents, which he afterwards employed to ſo great advantage in the defence of Chriſtianity. The ſame book was afterwards anſwered by the ingenious Mr. Stephen Nye, in his *Hiſtorical Account and Defence of the Canon of the New Teſtament, in Anſwer to "Amyntor"*; and by Mr. Richardſon, in his *Canon of the New Teſtament Vindicated*, whoſe work hath been juſtly and generally eſteemed, as executed with great learning and judgment. To theſe may be added, Mr. Jones, who hath conſidered this matter diſtinctly, and at large, in his *New and full Method of ſettling the Canonical Authority of the New Teſtament*, which was publiſhed at London in 1726, in two volumes 8vo.; to which a third ſmall one was afterwards added, publiſhed in 1727, but left unfiniſhed by reaſon of the author's death.

Theſe learned writers have plainly ſhewn Mr. Toland's great unfairneſs and diſingenuity in his whole management of the argument: That he has frequently impoſed upon his readers by falſe quotations, or by groſsly miſrepreſenting the authors he cites: That he has been guilty of great blunders and ridiculous miſtakes: That ſeveral of the writings he produces, as having been written in the apoſtolic age, were forged ſo late as the third or fourth century: That by far the greateſt part of thoſe writings, of which he hath given ſo pompous a catalogue, and which he would put upon the world as moſt ancient and apoſtolical, are expreſsly rejected by the authors whom he himſelf refers to, as ſpurious and apocryphal, or even as abſurd and impious forgeries: That as to thoſe few of them which are not expreſsly rejected and condemned by the writers who have mentioned them, it doth not appear by any one teſtimony, that they were ever generally received and acknowledged in the Chriſtian church, or equalled with the books of the ſacred Canon: and that even thoſe authors who have been thought to quote ſome of them with approbation, yet expreſsly declare, that none but the four goſpels were received in the Chriſtian church, as of divine authority:

That though ſome of the falſe goſpels, that they might the better paſs upon the people, were compiled out of the genuine goſpels, with ſuch additions, omiſſions, and interpolations, as might beſt anſwer the deſign of the compilers, this did not hinder their being generally rejected; whereas the four goſpels, the ſame which we now receive, were generally acknowledged from the beginning: That theſe and other ſacred books of the New Teſtament were, even in the earlieſt ages, ſpread into diſtant countries, and were in the poſſeſſion of great numbers of perſons, and read in the churches as divine: And finally, that ſeveral of the genuine writers of the three firſt centuries have left us catalogues of the ſacred books of the New Teſtament, but in none of theſe catalogues do any of the apocryphal books appear.

To ſet this whole matter in a clearer light, Mr. Jones has given us a complete enumeration of all the apocryphal books of the New Teſtament, and made a critical inquiry into each of theſe books, with an Engliſh verſion of thoſe of them which are now extant, and a particular proof that none of them were ever admitted into the Canon: and he hath diſtinctly produced and conſidered every teſtimony relating to them that is to be found in any Chriſtian writer or writers of the firſt four centuries after Chriſt.

Upon all that hath been written on this ſubject, it is a juſt and natural reflection, that as the number of ſpurious goſpels which were rejected by the primitive Chriſtians ſhews, how ſcrupulous they were not to admit any books as canonical, but thoſe of whoſe truth and authenticity they had ſufficient proofs; ſo their admitting, and receiving with ſo general a conſent, the four goſpels which are now in our hands, affordeth a ſtrong argument, that they had undoubted evidence of the genuine truth and certainty of the evangelical records, which fully ſatisfied them who lived neareſt thoſe times, and who had the beſt opportunities of knowing; and that to this it was owing, that theſe, and no others, were generally received and acknowledged as of divine authority.

On this occaſion it is proper to mention Dr. Lardner's excellent work of the *Credibility of the Goſpel-Hiſtory*; in the ſecond part of which, conſiſting of ſeveral volumes, he hath made a full and accurate collection of the paſſages which are to be found in the writers of the firſt ages of the Chriſtian church, relating to

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the four goſpels, and other ſacred books of the New Teſtament. This he hath executed with ſo much fidelity and diligence, and with ſuch exactneſs of judgment, that the Engliſh reader, who hath not opportunity to conſult the originals, will be able to judge for himſelf, upon conſidering the paſſages of the original authors, which are very faithfully tranſlated. This affordeth ſo clear and continued a proof of their having been generally received in the earlieſt ages of the Chriſtian church, that one would hope it ſhould put an end to this part of the controverſy.

LETTER V.

The Earl of Shafteſbury, a fine and much admired Writer—Not very conſiſtent in the Account he gives of Chriſtianity—He caſteth Reflections on the Doctrine of future Rewards and Puniſhments, as if it were of Diſſervice to the Intereſts of Virtue—The contrary ſhewn from his own Acknowledgments—His Lordſhip reſolves the Credit of holy Writ wholly into the Authority and Appointment of the State—He frequently takes Occaſion to expoſe the Scriptures, and repreſents them as uncertain, and not to be depended upon—What he ſaith concerning Ridicule, as the Teſt and Criterion of Truth, examined—It is ſhewn, that a turn to Ridicule is not the propereſt Diſpoſition for finding out Truth: and that there is great Danger of its being miſapplied—His Lordſhip's own Writings furniſh Inſtances of ſuch a wrong Application—Authors mentioned that have written againſt him.

SIR,

IT gives me a real concern, that, among the writers who have appeared againſt revealed religion, I am obliged to take notice of the noble author of the *Characteriſtics*. Some indeed are not willing to allow, that he is to be reckoned in this number. Paſſages are produced out of ſome of his writings, in which he expreſſeth very favourable ſentiments of Chriſtianity. This he doth particularly in a preface, which, and I believe juſtly, is aſcribed to his Lordſhip as the author, prefixed to a volume of ſelect ſermons of Dr. Benjamin Whichcot, publiſhed in 1698. In that preface he finds fault with thoſe in this profane age that repreſent not only the inſtitution of preaching, but even the goſpel itſelf, and our holy religion, to be a fraud. He expreſſeth his hope, that from ſome things in theſe ſermons, even they that are prejudiced againſt Chriſtianity may be induced to like it the better; and that the vein of goodneſs which appears throughout theſe diſcourſes will make ſuch as are already Chriſtians prize Chriſtianity the more; and the fairneſs, ingenuity, and impartiality,

tiality, which they learn from hence, will be a ſecurity to them againſt the contrary temper of thoſe other irreconcilable enemies to our holy faith. In 1716 ſome of his letters were publiſhed at London, under the title of *Several Letters written by a noble Lord to a young Man in the Univerſity*, 8vo. In theſe letters, which were written a few years before the Earl of Shafteſbury's death, in the years 1707, 1708, 1709, there are excellent ſentiments and advices, and ſome which ſeem to diſcover a real regard for the Chriſtian religion.

It were greatly to be wiſhed, on many accounts, that his Lordſhip had always expreſſed himſelf in an uniform manner on this ſubject. No impartial man will deny him the praiſe of a fine genius. The quality of the writer, his lively and beautiful imagination, the delicacy of taſte he hath ſhown in many inſtances, and the graces and embelliſhments of his ſtyle, though perhaps ſometimes too affected, have procured him many admirers. To which may be added, his refined ſentiments on the beauty and excellence of virtue, and that he hath often ſpoken honourably of a wiſe and good providence, which miniſters and governs the whole in the beſt manner; and hath ſtrongly aſſerted, in oppoſition to Mr. Hobbes, the natural differences between good and evil; and that man was originally formed for ſociety, and the exerciſe of mutual kindneſs and benevolence; and not only ſo, but for religion and piety too*. Theſe things have very much prejudiced many perſons in his favour, and prepared them for receiving, almoſt implicitly, whatever he hath advanced. And yet it cannot be denied, that there are many things in his books, which ſeem to be evidently calculated to caſt contempt upon Chriſtianity and the holy Scriptures.

It is in the *Characteriſtics* that we are properly to look for an account of his Lordſhip's ſentiments. They were firſt publiſhed in three volumes 8vo, in 1711; and the laſt part of his life was employed in reviſing them, and preparing for a new and moſt correct edition of them, which accordingly was publiſhed immediately after his death. In them he completed the whole of his works which he intended ſhould be made public: and theſe books are ſo generally read, and by many ſo much admired, that

* Characteriſtics, vol. iii. p. 224.

it is neceſſary to take notice of thoſe things in them which ſeem to have a bad aſpect on religion, and to be of a dangerous influence and tendency.

Of this kind are the frequent reflections he hath caſt on the doctrine of future rewards and puniſhments. This, as I obſerved in a former letter, is repreſented by Lord Herbert as a fundamental article of natural religion: and though he carries it too far, in making it an innate principle, in which all mankind are, and have been always agreed; yet it cannot be denied, that there were ſome notices and traces of it generally ſpread among the nations, though mixed with much obſcurity, and which probably had a great effect in preſerving the remains of religion and virtue among the people, though contradicted by ſeveral ſects of their philoſophers. It is the great advantage and glory of Chriſtianity, that it hath cleared and confirmed this important principle, and hath brought life and immortality into an open light. But the author of the *Characteriſtics* frequently expreſſeth himſelf in a manner, which tendeth to raiſe a prejudice againſt this great principle of natural and revealed religion, as if it were of little uſe in morals, yea, and in many caſes of a bad tendency. Thus, after having made an elegant repreſentation of the happy ſtate of things in the heathen world, and the liberty and harmony which then prevailed, he proceeds to ſhew the different ſtate of things among Chriſtians, which he ſeems chiefly to attribute to the notion and belief of a future ſtate. "A new ſort of policy (ſaith "he) which extends itſelf to another world, and conſiders the "future lives and happineſs of men rather than the preſent, has "made us leap beyond the bounds of natural humanity, and, out "of a ſupernatural charity, has taught us the way of plaguing one "another moſt heartily. It has raiſed an antipathy which no "temporal intereſt could ever do, and intailed upon us a mutual "hatred to all eternity. The *ſaving of ſouls* is now the heroic "paſſion of exalted ſpirits*." This is not the only place where his Lordſhip ſpeaks with ridicule of the *ſaving of ſouls*, and of thoſe *who act for their ſouls' ſakes*, and *make a careful proviſion for hereafter*†. And he elſewhere tells us, ſpeaking of the expectation of God's diſpenſing rewards and puniſhments in a fu-

* Characteriſtics, vol. i. p. 18, 19. edit. 5th. † Ibid. vol. iii. p. 302.

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ture life, that "an expectation and dependency so miraculous "and extraordinary as this is, must naturally take off from other "inferior dependencies and encouragements. Where infinite "rewards are thus enforced, and the imagination strongly turned "towards them, the other common and natural motives to good-"ness are apt to be neglected, and lose much by disuse. Other "interests are hardly so much as computed, whilst the mind is "thus transported in the pursuit of a high advantage, and self-"interest, so narrowly confined within ourselves. On this ac-"count, all other affections to our friends, relations, or mankind, "are often slightly regarded, as being worldly, and of little mo-"ment in respect of the interest of our souls*." To the same purpose he represents it, as if the Christian were so urged to have his *conversation in heaven*, as not to be obliged to *enter into any engagements with this lower world*, or to concern himself either with the businesses of life, or with the offices of *private friendship*, or the service of the public: and that these are to be regarded as *embarrassments to him in working out his own salvation*†. It seems to be a natural inference from all this, that, according to his representation of the matter, it were better for mankind not to believe, or have any regard to a future state at all; for if the belief be weak, he tells us it will be of the worst consequence. "There can (says he) in some respects be nothing more fatal to "virtue than the weak and uncertain belief of future rewards and "punishments: for the stress being wholly laid on this founda-"tion, if this foundation seem to fail, there is no farther prop "or security to men's virtue‡." And, on the other hand, if the belief be strong, and deeply impressed on the mind, it will cause men to neglect the interests and duties of this present life, the duties they owe to their friends, their neighbours, and their country. This is the account his Lordship gives of it; but it is grossly misrepresented: for since that virtue and goodness which is to be rewarded hereafter includes, according to the scripture account of it, the doing good here on earth as far as we have an opportunity, and even a diligence in the business of our several callings, and the exercise of social duties, it is evidently wrong

* Characteristics, vol. ii. p. 68. † Ibid. vol. i. p. 99, 100.
‡ Ibid. vol. ii. p. 69.

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to ſay, that a regard to the recompences of a future ſtate muſt carry us off from thoſe duties, when, on the contrary, it bindeth us more ſtrongly to the performance of them. Our having our converſation in heaven is not deſigned to cauſe us to neglect the duties incumbent upon us here on earth; for theſe are moſt expreſsly enjoined in the goſpel-law, as being comprehended in that righteouſneſs which intitleth us to that future glory; but that we ſhould not take up with the inferior things of this preſent world as our proper ultimate portion and happineſs, but raiſe our views to a nobler ſtate, where we hope to arrive to the true felicity and perfection of our natures. And this certainly is an admirable leſſon, highly to the honour of Chriſtianity; ſince it is a too great affection and eſteem for worldly enjoyments that puts men upon wrong purſuits, and is the principal ſource of the greateſt diſorders of human life.

Several other paſſages might be produced, in which his Lordſhip ſeems to repreſent the belief and expectation of a future ſtate as of pernicious influence. Thus he obſerves, "that the prin-"ciple of ſelf-love, which is naturally ſo prevailing in us, is "improved and made ſtronger every day by the exerciſe of the "paſſions on a ſubject of more extended intereſt;" (by which he refers to the expectation of eternal happineſs in a future ſtate) "and that there may be reaſon to apprehend, that a temper of "this kind will extend itſelf through all the parts of life. And "this has a tendency to create a ſtricter attention to ſelf-good "and private intereſt, and muſt inſenſibly diminiſh the affection "towards public good, or the intereſt of ſociety; and introduce "a certain narrowneſs of ſpirit, which is obſervable in devout "perſons of almoſt all religions and perſuaſions*." Here he lays a heavy charge on the hope of future happineſs; as if it had a bad tendency, to ſpread an inordinate criminal ſelfiſhneſs through the whole of human life, to diminiſh the public-good affections, and introduce a narrowneſs of ſpirit. A moſt unjuſt charge this! Since it might eaſily be ſhewn, that the belief and hope of ſuch an happineſs as the goſpel ſets before us, and which is there repreſented as a ſtate of perfect goodneſs and the moſt extended benevolence, and for which that *charity* which *ſeeketh*

* Characteriſtics, vol. ii. p. 58.

not

not her own is one of the beſt preparatives, has a tendency, if rightly underſtood, to enlarge the heart, to purify and ennoble the ſoul, and raiſe it above the little narrow intereſts of the fleſhly ſelf, and to fill it with the higheſt idea of God, and his immenſe goodneſs.

But his Lordſhip urges, that "thoſe who talk of the rewards "of virtue make it ſo very mercenary a thing, and have talked ſo "much of its rewards, that one can hardly tell what there is in it "after all that is worth rewarding*." He obſerves that the moſt *heroic virtue*, *private friendſhip*, and *zeal for the public*†, have little notice taken of them in our *holy religion*, nor have any reward promiſed them: though if they be comprehended in the things that are *lovely* and *virtuous* and *praiſe-worthy*, they are both commanded there, and ſhall according to the goſpel ſcheme be rewarded; but his Lordſhip who ſuppoſes the contrary, mentions it as an advantage, that no premium or penalty being inforced in theſe caſes, it leaves *more room for diſintereſtedneſs*.

* Characteriſtics, vol. i. p. 97.

† It has been noted by the deiſtical writers, that zeal for the public, or love to a man's country, which was ſo much inculcated by ſome of the ancient philoſophers and moraliſts, is paſſed over in the Goſpel; and this is mentioned as a defect in the Chriſtian morality. But if the matter be rightly conſidered, there is no juſt foundation for this objection. To have recommended as by a divine authority, what the Romans generally underſtood by love to their country, a ſtrong paſſion for the glory of it, and which often carried them to do great injuſtice to thoſe of other nations, would not have been ſuited to the nature of a revelation, which was deſigned for the general good of mankind, and to promote univerſal benevolence. And if our Saviour had exhorted the Jews in the name of God to a zeal for their country and its liberties, this, in the diſpoſition they were then in, could have been looked upon in no other light, than as ſtirring them up to tumults and inſurrections. But of love to our country, as it ſignifies a true and affectionate concern for the public good, he gave an admirable example; and his example hath the force of a precept, according to the Chriſtian ſyſtem. This will be evident to any one that impartially conſiders the affection he ſhewed to the Jewiſh nation, from whom he ſprung according to the fleſh; the amiable concern he expreſſed for the miſeries he foreſaw were coming upon them, and the endeavours he uſed to prevent thoſe evils, by checking the tumultuous ſpirit which was then working among them, and engaging them to a peaceable ſubjection to the Roman government. The ſame obſervation may be made with regard to the apoſtles and firſt publiſhers of Chriſtianity after our Saviour's reſurrection. If they had in the name of God urged it

neſs, the virtue is a *free choice*, and *the magnanimity is left entire**. And does not this inſinuate, that if no reward had been promiſed at all, to any part of our duty, it would have been the better for us, and our virtues would have been the more excellent? In like manner he repreſents that reſignation to God, which depends upon the hope of infinite retributions or rewards, to be a *falſe reſignation*, which *diſcovers no worth nor virtue*; ſince it is only a man's reſigning his preſent life and pleaſure conditionally, for that which he himſelf owns to be beyond an equivalent†.

And yet this right honourable author himſelf acknowledgeth, that if by the hope of reward be underſtood the hope and deſire of virtuous enjoyments, or of the very practice and exerciſe of virtue in another life, it is far from being derogatory to virtue, but is rather an evidence of our loving it‡. And nothing is more evident to any one that is acquainted with the holy ſcriptures, than that though the future happineſs is there ſometimes metaphorically deſcribed under ſplendid ſenſible images, which his Lordſhip is pleaſed to reflect upon as trifling and childiſh §,

it upon the Jews and Gentiles, among whom they preached the goſpel, to be zealous for their country, and had promiſed divine rewards to ſo heroic a virtue, this would undoubtedly have been regarded as an attempt to raiſe diſturbances in the ſtate. It could not, as things were circumſtanced, have produced any good effects, and might probably have had very bad ones. But if by zeal for the public be meant a hearty deſire and endeavour to promote the public good, and the real welfare of the community, nothing can be better fitted to anſwer that end than the Chriſtian law. It hath a manifeſt tendency, wherever it is ſincerely believed and embraced, to make good magiſtrates, and faithful and peaceable ſubjects, and to render men truly uſeful to the public, by engaging them to a diligent diſcharge of the duties of their ſeveral ſtations and relations, and to the practice of univerſal righteouſneſs. Chriſtianity, which requires us to exert ſo noble a ſpirit of diſintereſted benevolence, as to be ready to lay down our lives for the brethren, 1 John iii. 16, would certainly engage and animate us, if properly called to it, even to lay down our lives for the good of the community. A virtuous regard to the public happineſs, and a contributing as far as in us lies to promote it in our ſeveral ſtations, make a part of that excellent and praiſe-worthy conduct, which it is the great deſign of the Chriſtian religion to promote, and which, according to the divine promiſes there given us, ſhall be crowned with a glorious reward.

* Characteriſt. p. 98, 99, 100, 101. † Ibid. vol. ii. p. 59.
‡ Ibid. vol. ii. p. 55, 56. § Ibid. vol. i. p. 282.

yet

yet the idea there given us of it is the nobleſt, the ſublimeſt, that can be conceived. It is repreſented as a ſtate of conſummate holineſs, goodneſs, and purity, where we ſhall arrive to the true perfection of our natures; a ſtate into which *nothing ſhall enter that defileth;* where the ſpirits of the juſt ſhall be *made perfect*, and even their bodies ſhall be refined to a wonderful degree; where they ſhall be aſſociated to the glorious general aſſembly of holy and happy ſouls, and to the moſt excellent part of God's creation, with whom they ſhall cultivate an eternal friendſhip and harmony; and, which is chiefly to be conſidered, where they ſhall be admitted to the immediate viſion of the Deity, and ſhall be transformed, as far as they are capable of it, into the divine likeneſs. Such is the happineſs the goſpel ſetteth before us, and which certainly furniſheth a motive fitted to work upon the worthieſt minds. And the being animated by the hope of ſuch a reward hath nothing mean or mercenary in it, but rather is an argument of a great and noble ſoul.

And even as to the fear of puniſhment, this alſo may be of ſignal uſe to reſtrain the exorbitancies of the paſſions, to check the career of vice, and to awaken men to ſerious thoughts, and thereby put them in the way of better impreſſions. His Lordſhip himſelf aſſerteth the uſefulneſs of puniſhments, as well as rewards, in all well-regulated governments. And with reſpect to future puniſhments he acknowledgeth, that "though this ſervice of fear be allowed ever ſo low and baſe, yet religion being "ſtill a diſcipline and progreſs of the ſoul towards perfection, the "motive of reward and puniſhment is primary, and of the higheſt "moment with us, till being capable of more ſublime inſtructions, "we are led from this ſervile ſtate to the generous ſervice of "affection and love*." And he elſewhere expreſsly declareth, that "the hope of future rewards, and fear of future puniſhments, "how mercenary or ſervile ſoever it may be accounted, is yet "in many inſtances a great advantage, ſecurity, and ſupport to "virtue;" and he offereth ſeveral conſiderations to prove that it is ſo†. I cannot therefore help thinking that this admired writer has done very wrong in throwing out ſo many inſinuations againſt the doctrine of future retributions, and againſt the holy ſcrip-

* Characteriſt. vol. ii. p. 63. 273. † Ibid. vol. ii. p. 60. & ſeq.

tures

tures and Chriſtian divines for inſiſting ſo much upon it, as though it were of ill influence to morals. I am perſuaded, that any one who duly conſiders the ſtate of mankind, and what a mighty influence our hopes and fears have upon us by the very frame of our nature, muſt be ſenſible, that if the ſcripture had only contained fine and elegant diſcourſes on the beauty of virtue, and the deformity of vice, inſtead of propoſing the ſanctions of eternal rewards and puniſhments, it would neither have been ſo becoming the majeſty and dignity of the ſupreme legiſlator, nor ſo well fitted to anſwer the end of a revelation deſigned for common uſe. The ſcripture indeed doth every where ſuppoſe, and frequently repreſenteth the excellence of holineſs and virtue, and the turpitude and deformity of vice and ſin, and the good effects of the one, and bad effects of the other, even in this preſent ſtate. But it is the great advantage of the Chriſtian revelation, that it carrieth our views beyond this narrow tranſitory ſcene to a future eternal ſtate, and deriveth its moſt important motives from thence, which he himſelf acknowledgeth to be of infinitely greater force; and, which is very odd, he ſeemeth to make the very force of thoſe motives an objection againſt inſiſting upon them, as if they would render all other motives and conſiderations uſeleſs.

The prejudices his Lordſhip hath conceived againſt Chriſtianity ſufficiently appear from ſeveral of thoſe paſſages that have been mentioned; to which many others might be added. He is pleaſed indeed more than once to declare himſelf a very orthodox believer. He hath aſſured us, in his ironical way, of his *ſteady orthodoxy*, and *entire ſubmiſſion to the truly Chriſtian and Catholic doctrines of our holy church, as by law eſtabliſhed:* and that he faithfully embraces the *holy myſteries of our religion even in the minuteſt particulars, notwithſtanding their amazing depth**. For which he gives this reaſon, that "when the ſupreme powers "have given their ſanction to a religious record or pious writ, "it becomes immoral and profane in any one to deny or diſpute "the divine authority of the leaſt line or ſyllable contained in "it†." To the ſame purpoſe he elſewhere declares, that the myſteries of religion are to be *determined* by thoſe to whom the ſtate has *aſſigned* the *guardianſhip and promulgation of the di-*

* Characteriſtics, vol. iii. p. 315, 316. † Ibid. p. 231.

vine

vine oracles; and that the *authority and direction of the law* is the *only ſecurity againſt heterodoxy and error*, and the only warrant for the authority of *our ſacred ſymbols**. So that according to him, Chriſtianity has no other foundation than what will ſerve a falſe religion as well as the true. And elſewhere, in the perſon of the ſceptic, he talks of our *viſible ſovereign's anſwering for us in matters of religion*†. In this his Lordſhip exactly agrees with Mr. Hobbes: he is indeed far from aſſerting with that writer, that there is nothing good or evil in its own nature, and that virtue and vice depend wholly on human authority and laws; this he on all occaſions ſtrenuouſly argueth againſt. But he comes into another part of his ſcheme, the making the magiſtrate or ſupreme civil power the ſole judge of religious truth and orthodoxy, and reſolving all doctrines and opinions in religion, and the authority of what ſhall be accounted holy writ, into the appointment of the ſtate; a ſcheme which abſolutely deſtroyeth the rights of private judgment and conſcience, and which evidently condemneth the conduct and judgment of Chriſt and his apoſtles, and the primitive Chriſtians at the firſt plantation of Chriſtianity, and of thoſe excellent men that ſtood up for the reformation of it ſince.

But notwithſtanding our noble author's pretended veneration and ſubmiſſion to the holy writ *by public authority eſtabliſhed*, he hath taken occaſion to expoſe the ſcripture, as far as in him lay, to ridicule and contempt, of which many inſtances might be produced. Not to mention the inſinuations he has thrown out relating to particular paſſages both in the Old Teſtament and the New, he hath endeavoured to expoſe the ſpirit of prophecy, and made a ludicrous repreſentation of it, and compared it with the extravagancies of the maddeſt enthuſiaſts‡. Miracles he will not allow to be any proofs, though ever ſo certain§; or that there is any ground to believe their having been done, but the authority of our governors, and of thoſe whom the *ſtate* hath appointed the *guardians of holy writ*‖. He ſpeaks with ridicule, as other deiſtical writers have often done, of what he calls the

* Characteriſtics, p. 71. vol. i. p. 360.
† Ibid. vol. ii. p. 353.
‡ Ibid. vol. i. p. 45. vol. iii. p. 67.
§ Ibid. vol. ii. p. 331, 332.
‖ Ibid. vol. iii. p. 71, 72, 73.

ſpecious

ſpecious pretence of moral certainty, and *matter of fact* *, and inſinuates, that the facts recorded in the goſpels are abſolutely uncertain, and that he that relies upon thoſe accounts muſt be a *ſceptical Chriſtian* †. He repreſents St. Paul as ſpeaking *ſceptically*, and as *no way certain or poſitive as to the revelation made to him*, though the contrary is manifeſt from the apoſtle's own moſt expreſs declarations ‡. The very encomiums he ſometimes pretends to beſtow upon the ſcriptures are of ſuch a kind, as tend rather to give a low and mean idea of them. Thus he commends the *poetical parts of ſcripture*, Job, Pſalms, Proverbs, *and other entire volumes of the ſacred collection, as full of humourous diſcourſes, and jocular wit;* and ſaith, that the ſacred writers "had recourſe to humour and diverſion, as a proper "means to promote religion, and ſtrengthen the eſtabliſhed faith." In like manner he tells us, that our Saviour's diſcourſes were *ſharp, witty, and humourous;* and that his miracles were done with a *certain air of feſtivity;* and *ſo that it is impoſſible not to be moved in a pleaſant manner at their recital;* i. e. it is impoſſible not to laugh at them §. But though he ſeemeth here to commend his *good humour*, as he calls it, and elſewhere repreſents Chriſtianity as, *in the main, a witty good-natured religion*, he inſinuateth that this may be all an artful pretence to cover deep deſigns, and ſchemes laid for worldly ambition and power. Having obſerved, that the affection and love which procures a true adherence to the *new religious foundation*, muſt depend either on *a real or counterfeit goodneſs in the religious founder*, whom he had called before the *divinely-authorized inſtructor, and ſpiritual chief;* he adds, that, "whatever ambitious ſpirit may "inſpire him, whatever ſavage zeal or perſecuting principle may "be in reſerve, ready to diſcloſe itſelf, when authority and "power is once obtained, the firſt ſcene of doctrine however "fails not to preſent us with the agreeable views of joy, love, "meekneſs, gentleneſs, and moderation ‖." I believe few that conſider how this is introduced, will doubt its being deſigned as an inſinuation againſt the character of the holy Jeſus; an inſinuation for which there is not the leaſt foundation in his whole

* Characteriſtics, vol. i. p. 44. † Ibid. vol. iii. p. 72.
‡ Ibid. p. 74, 75. § Ibid. vol. iii. p. 118. 122, 123. ‖ Ibid. p. 114, 115.

conduct,

conduct, or in the ſcheme of religion he hath taught, and which therefore is as malicious as it is groundleſs.

Agreeably to this he elſewhere intimates, that the goſpel was only a ſcheme of the clergy for aggrandizing their own power. He repreſents it as a *natural ſuſpicion* of thoſe who are called ſceptical: "that the holy records themſelves were no other than "the pure invention and artificial compliment of an intereſted "party, in behalf of the richeſt corporation, and moſt profitable "monopoly, which could be erected in the world*." But any one that impartially conſiders the idea of religion ſet before us in the New Teſtament, in its primitive ſimplicity, will be apt to look upon that which his Lordſhip repreſenteth as a *natural ſuſpicion* to be the moſt unreaſonable ſuppoſition in the world. If an ambitious and ſelf-intereſted clergy, and particularly the favourers of the papal hierarchy, had been to forge a goſpel or ſacred records to countenance their own claims, or if they had had it in their power to have corrupted and new-modelled them in their favour, the Chriſtian religion and worſhip would in many inſtances have been very different from what it now appeareth to be in the ſacred writings of the New Teſtament. Mr. Hobbes himſelf was ſo ſenſible of this, even where he inveighs againſt the clergy, as endeavouring to put their own laws upon the Chriſtian people for the laws of God, and pretends that the books of the New Teſtament were in the firſt ages in the hands only of the Eccleſiaſtics, that he adds, "he is perſuaded "they did not falſify the ſcripture; becauſe, if they had had an "intention ſo to do, they would ſurely have made them more "favourable to their power over Chriſtian princes, and civil "ſovereignty, than they are†."

His Lordſhip on many occaſions inſinuates, that the original records of Chriſtianity are not at all to be depended upon. He frequently repeats the charge of corruptions and interpolations; and particularly concludes the laſt Miſcellany of his third volume with a heap of objections againſt the ſcriptures, drawn from the great number of copies, various readings, different gloſſes and interpretations, apocryphal and canonical books, frauds of thoſe through whoſe hands they have been tranſmitted to us, &c.‡.

* Characteriſt. p. 336. † Hobbes's Leviath. p. 203, 204.

‡ Characteriſt. vol. iii. p. 317—344.

Theſe objections are put into the mouth of a gentleman, whom he makes go off the ſtage with an air of triumph, as if they were unanſwerable: and yet they are no other than what have been frequently conſidered and obviated by the learned defenders of the Chriſtian cauſe. Dr. Tindal hath ſince urged all theſe objections, and more of the ſame kind, more largely and with greater force than his Lordſhip had done; and a full anſwer hath been returned to them, ſufficient to ſatisfy an impartial enquirer*.

I have already dwelt longer on this right honourable author than I at firſt intended; but you will undoubtedly expect that, before I leave him, I ſhould take ſome notice of that part of his ſcheme, where he ſeems to ſet up ridicule as the beſt and ſureſt criterion of truth: This deſerves the rather to be conſidered, becauſe there is not perhaps any part of his writings, of which a worſe uſe hath been made. I am ſenſible that ſome ingenious writers have been of opinion, that in this his Lordſhip has been greatly miſunderſtood or miſrepreſented: that his opinion, if fairly examined, amounts only to this, that ridicule may be of excellent uſe, either againſt ridicule itſelf, when falſe and miſapplied, or againſt grave, ſpecious, and deluſive impoſtures: that he diſtinguiſhes between true and falſe ridicule, and between *genteel wit*, and *ſcurrilous buffoonry*, which, without decency or diſtinction, raiſes a laugh from every thing. This he condemneth, as juſtly offenſive, and unworthy of a gentleman and a man of ſenſe. He would have religion treated with *good manners*, and is for ſubjecting ridicule to the judgment of reaſon; and he declares, that as he is in *earneſt in defending raillery*, ſo he can be *ſober in the uſe of it*. Several paſſages are produced to this purpoſe†. But whatever apology may be made for this noble writer, I think it cannot be denied, that he has frequently expreſſed himſelf very incautiouſly on this head, and in a manner that may lead perſons into a very wrong method of inquiring and judging concerning truth. He not only expreſsly calls ridicule a *teſt*, and a *criterion of truth*, but declares for applying it to every thing, and in all caſes. He would have us carry the *rule* of ridicule conſtantly with us, *i. e.* that we muſt be always in a diſpoſition to apply

* See particularly Anſwer to Chriſtianity as old as the Creation, vol. ii. chap. 5. 7, 8.

† Characteriſt. vol. i. p. 11. 63. 83, 84, 85. 128.

ridicule

ridicule to whatever offers, to ſee whether it will bear*. He obſerves, that "truth may bear all lights; and one of thoſe prin- "cipal lights or natural mediums, by which things are to be "viewed in order to a thorough recognition, is ridicule itſelf, or "that manner of proof (for ſo he calls it) by which we diſcern "whatever is liable to juſt raillery on any ſubject†:" and though he doth not approve the ſeeking to *raiſe a laugh for every thing*, yet he thinks it right to *ſeek in every thing what juſtly may be laughed at*‡. He declares that "he hardly cares ſo much as to "think on the ſubject of religion, much leſs to write on it, "without endeavouring to put himſelf in as good a humour as "poſſible§:" *i. e.* treating it, as he himſelf expreſſeth it, *in a* way of *wit* and *raillery*, *pleaſantry* and *mirth*. And indeed what kind of ridicule his Lordſhip is for, and how he is for applying it in matters of religion, plainly appears from many ſpecimens he has given us of it in ſeveral parts of his works; eſpecially in his third volume, which is deſigned as a kind of review and defence of all his other treatiſes.

The beſt and wiſeſt men in all ages have always recommended a calm attention and ſobriety of mind, a cool and impartial examination and enquiry, as the propereſt diſpoſition for finding out truth, and judging concerning it. But according to his Lordſhip's repreſentation of the caſe, thoſe that apply themſelves to the ſearching out truth, or judging what is really true, ſerious, and excellent, muſt endeavour to put themſelves in a merry humour, to raiſe up a gaiety of ſpirit, and ſeek whether in the object they are examining they cannot find out *ſomething that may be juſtly laughed at*. And it is great odds, that a man who is thus diſpoſed will find out ſomething fit, as he imagines, to excite his mirth, in the moſt ſerious and important ſubject in the world. Such a temper is ſo far from being an help to a fair and unprejudiced enquiry, that it is one of the greateſt hindrances to it. A ſtrong turn to ridicule hath a tendency to diſqualify a man for cool and ſedate reflection, and to render him impatient of the pains that are neceſſary to a rational and deliberate ſearch. A calm diſpaſſionate love of truth, with a diſpoſition to examine

* Characteriſt. p. 11, 12.

‡ Ibid. p. 128.

† Ibid. vol. i. p. 61.

§ Ibid. p. 128.

carefully and judge impartially, and a prevailing inclination to jeſt and raillery, ſeldom meet together in the ſame mind. This diſcovereth rather an odd turn and vivacity of imagination, than ſtrong reaſon and ſound judgment; and it would be a ſtrange attempt to ſet up wit and imagination, inſtead of reaſon and judgment, for a judge and umpire in matters of the greateſt conſequence.

Our noble author indeed frequently obſerves, that truth cannot be hurt by ridicule, ſince, when the ridicule is wrong placed, it will not hold. "Nothing is ridiculous, but what is deformed; "nor is any thing proof againſt raillery, but what is handſome "and juſt: this weapon therefore can never bear an edge againſt "virtue and honeſty, and bears againſt every thing contrary to "it*." It will be readily allowed, that truth and honeſty cannot be the ſubject of *juſt* ridicule; but then this ſuppoſeth, that ridicule itſelf muſt be brought to the teſt of cool reaſon: and accordingly his Lordſhip acknowledges, that it is *in reality a ſerious ſtudy to temper and regulate that humour*†. And thus after all, we are to return to gravity and ſerious reaſon as the ultimate teſt and criterion of ridicule, and of every thing elſe. But though the moſt excellent things cannot be juſtly ridiculed, and ridicule, when thus applied, will, in the judgment of wiſe and thinking men, render him that uſeth it ridiculous; yet there are many perſons on whom it will have a very different effect. The ridicule will be apt to create prejudices in their minds, and to inſpire them with a contempt, or at leaſt a diſregard of things, which, when repreſented in a proper light, appear to be of the greateſt worth and importance. *The face of truth* indeed, as his Lordſhip obſerves, *is not leſs fair and beautiful for all the counterfeit vizards that have been put upon it;* yet theſe vizards may ſo conceal and diſguiſe its beauty, as to make it look a quite different thing from what it really is. It cannot be denied, that truth, piety, and virtue, have often been the ſubjects of ridicule; and bad, but witty, men have met with too much ſucceſs in expoſing them to the deriſion and contempt, inſtead of recommending them to the eſteem and veneration, of mankind. It is our author's own obſervation, that *falſe earneſt is ridiculed, but the*

* Characteriſt. vol. i. p. 11. 128, 129. † Ibid. p. 128.

falſe

falſe jeſt paſſes ſecure. And though he ſays, he cannot conceive how any man ſhould be *laughed out of his wits*, as ſome have been *frightened out of them*, yet there have been and are too many inſtances of perſons that have been laughed out of their religion, honeſty, and virtue. Weak and unſtable minds have been driven into atheiſm, profaneneſs, and vice, by the force of ridicule, and have been made aſhamed of that which they ought to eſteem their glory.

His Lordſhip is pleaſed to repreſent ridicule as the fitteſt way of dealing with *enthuſiaſts*, and *venders of miracles and prophecy;* and having mentioned the reveries of the French prophets, and recommended *Bartlemy-Fair drollery*, as proper to be uſed on ſuch occaſions, he gives a broad hint, that if this method had been taken againſt the reformation, or againſt Chriſtianity at its firſt riſe, it would have been effectual to deſtroy it, without having recourſe to perſecution*. He has here plainly let us know in what light he regardeth our holy religion. On other occaſions, he declares only for genteel raillery: but here it ſeems what he calls the *Bartlemy-Fair method*, which I believe will hardly paſs for very genteel raillery, is ſuppoſed to be ſufficient, not only againſt that ſet of *enthuſiaſts* who were called the French prophets, but againſt Chriſtianity itſelf. But he ſeems not to have conſidered, that the great author and firſt publiſhers of the Chriſtian religion were ſcoffed and derided, as well as expoſed to grievous ſufferings and torments, and that they had *trial of cruel mockings*, as well as of *bonds* and *impriſonments*. It appears from what remains of the works of Celſus, as well as from what Cæcilius ſaith in Minucius Felix, that no ſarcaſm or ridicule was ſpared among the heathens, by which they thought they could expoſe Chriſtianity; though when they found this ineffectual to ſuppreſs it, they from time to time had recourſe to more violent and ſanguinary methods: and indeed thoſe that have been moſt prone to ſcoff at religion and truth have often been moſt prone to perſecute it too. A ſcornful and contemptuous ſpirit, which is an uſual attendant on ridicule, is apt to proceed to farther extremes; nor am I ſure, that they, who on all occaſions throw out the bittereſt ſarcaſms againſt religion and its miniſters, would not, if it were in their power, give more ſub-

* Characteriſt. vol. i. p. 28, 29.

ſtantial proofs of their averſion. His Lordſhip indeed honoureth that raillery and ridicule which he recommends, with the name of *good-humour;* and by ſhuffling one of theſe for the other, and playing upon the words, maketh himſelf merry with his reader. But *good-humour* taken in the beſt ſenſe, for what he calls the *ſweeteſt, kindeſt diſpoſition*, is a different thing from that ſneering faculty, which diſpoſes men to caſt contempt upon perſons and things, and which is often managed in a manner little conſiſtent with a true benevolence.

The proper uſe of ridicule is to expoſe ſuch follies and abſurdities as ſcarce deſerve or admit a very ſerious conſideration: but to recommend raillery and ridicule as fit to be employed on all occaſions, and upon the moſt weighty and important ſubjects, and as the propereſt means for diſcerning truth, appears to be an inverting the juſt order of things. It is, even when innocently uſed, for the moſt part a trifling employment; and a man of great genius cannot addict himſelf much to it, without deſcending beneath his character. Indeed there needs no more to give one a diſguſt at this pretended teſt of truth, than to conſider the uſe his Lordſhip has made of it. When he is in any degree ſerious, he ſhews how capable he is to inform and pleaſe his reader; but when he gives a looſe to gaiety and ridicule, he often writes in a manner unworthy of himſelf. And I am apt to think, that if nothing of his had been publiſhed, but the two firſt treatiſes of his firſt volume, and the third volume, in which he chiefly indulges himſelf in thoſe liberties, he would have generally paſſed in the world for a ſprightly and ingenious, but very trifling writer. He often throws out his ſneers and flirts againſt every thing that comes in his way; and with a mixture of low and ſolemn phraſe, and grave ridicule, he ſometimes manages it ſo, that it is not very eaſy to diſcern his true ſentiments; and what it is that he really aims at. This is not very conſiſtent with the rule he himſelf has laid down more than once; viz. That "it is a mean, "impotent, and dull ſort of wit, which leaves ſenſible perſons "in a doubt, and at a loſs to underſtand what one's real mind "is." And again he cenſures "ſuch a feigned gravity, as immoral "and illiberal, foreign to the character of a good writer, a gentle-"man, and a man of ſenſe*." There ſeems to be no other way

* Characteriſt. vol. i. p. 63, vol. iii. p. 225.

of

of ſcreening him from his own cenſure, but by ſuppoſing, that he imagined his true intention with regard to Chriſtianity and the holy Scriptures might be perceived by any ſenſible perſon, through his concealed ridicule. And it muſt be acknowledged that, for the moſt part, it is ſo; though, in ſome particular places, it is hard to know whether he be in jeſt or earneſt. By this covered way of ridicule he ſometimes ſteals upon the reader before he is aware, and, under the guiſe of a friend, gives a more dangerous blow, than if he had acted the part of an open and avowed enemy.

Upon the whole it may be juſtly ſaid, that in this noble and ingenious author we have a remarkable inſtance of the wrong application of that talent of ridicule, of which he was ſo great a maſter. And if it has ſucceeded ill in his hands, how much more may it be expected to do ſo in thoſe who, for want of his genius, are not able to riſe above low buffoonry, nor capable of diſtinguiſhing groſs and ſcurrilous raillery and ſcandal from wit and delicate ridicule! His Lordſhip hath ſince had many awkward imitators, and probably will have more, who will be apt to apply his teſt of ridicule, not only, as he himſelf hath given them an example, againſt revealed religion, but againſt all religion, even that which is called natural, and againſt that virtue, of which, in his ſerious moods, he hath profeſſed himſelf ſo great an admirer.

I ſhall conclude my account of this celebrated author with obſerving, that the *Characteriſtics* have been attacked, or at leaſt ſome particular paſſages in them have been occaſionally animadverted upon, by ſeveral learned writers, by biſhop Berkley, Dr. Wotton, Dr. Warburton, and others. That part of his Lordſhip's ſcheme which repreſents a regard to future rewards, as derogating from the dignity and excellence of virtue, hath been particularly conſidered by Mr. Balguy, in a ſhort but judicious tract, written, like his other tracts, in a very polite and maſterly manner. It is intitled, *A Letter to a Deiſt, concerning the Beauty and Excellency of Moral Virtue, and the Support and Improvement which it receives from the Chriſtian Revelation*, 8vo. 1729. But I know of none that has undertaken to anſwer the whole, but Mr. (now) Dr. John Brown, in a treatiſe intitled, *Eſſays on the Characteriſtics*, publiſhed in 1750. This work is divided into three eſſays: the firſt is on ridicule, conſidered as a teſt of truth:

the ſecond is on the obligations of men to virtue, and the neceſſity of religious principles: the third is on revealed religion and Chriſtianity. Under theſe ſeveral heads, he hath conſidered whatever appeared to be moſt obnoxious in the writings of our noble author.

The length of this letter may ſeem to need an apology. But you, I know, will agree with me, that as it was proper, in purſuance of the deſign in which I am engaged, to take notice of this admired writer, ſo it was neceſſary to make ſuch obſervations as might help to obviate the prejudices ſo many are apt to entertain in his favour, to the diſadvantage even of Chriſtianity itſelf.

LETTER VI.

The Account given of the Earl of Shafteſbury's Writings in the foregoing Letter, vindicated againſt the Exceptions that had been made againſt it—The being influenced by the Hope of the Reward promiſed in the Goſpel hath nothing in it diſingenuous and ſlaviſh—It is not inconſiſtent with loving Virtue for its own ſake, but tends rather to heighten our Eſteem for its Worth and Amiableneſs—The Earl of Shafteſbury ſeems, in his Inquiry concerning Virtue, *to erect ſuch a Scheme of Virtue as is independent of Religion, and may ſubſiſt without it—The Apology he makes for doing ſo—The cloſe Connection there is between Religion and Virtue ſhewn from his own Principles and Acknowledgments—Virtue not wholly confined to good Actions towards Mankind, but takes in proper Affections towards the Deity as an eſſential Part of it—He acknowledges that Man is born to Religion.—A remarkable Paſſage of Lord Bolingbroke's to the ſame Purpoſe.*

SIR,

WHEN I firſt publiſhed the *View of the Deiſtical Writers*, the foregoing letter contained the whole of what I then intended with regard to the obſervations on the Earl of Shafteſbury. But not long after the publication of it, ſome perſons, who profeſs to be real friends to Chriſtianity, and I doubt not are ſo, let me know that they wiſhed I had not put his Lordſhip into the liſt of deiſtical writers: and they thought the charge againſt him had in ſome inſtances been carried too far. This put me upon reviſing what I had written relating to that matter, with great care: and if I had found juſt cauſe to think, that in this inſtance I had been miſtaken in the judgment I had formed, I ſhould have thought myſelf obliged publicly to acknowledge it. For when I formed the deſign of taking a view of the deiſtical writers, I fixed it as a rule to myſelf, to make a fair repreſentation, as far as I was able, of the ſentiments of thoſe writers, and not to puſh the charge againſt them farther than there appeared to me to be juſt ground for. And it would have given

given me a real pleaſure to have reaſon to rank ſo fine a writer as the Earl of Shaftesbury among the friends of the Chriſtian cauſe. But upon the moſt impartial enquiry I was able to make, I have not ſeen reaſon to retract any thing I had offered with regard to that noble Lord. I thought it neceſſary therefore, in the *Supplement to the View of the Deiſtical Writers*, to publiſh a letter on that ſubject, which I ſhall here ſubjoin to the preceding one, that the reader may have all before him which relates to that noble writer in one view.

It can ſcarce, I think, be denied by any impartial perſon who hath read the *Characteriſtics* without prejudice, which are the only works he avowed, and which had his laſt hand, that there are ſeveral paſſages in them, which ſeem plainly intended to expoſe Chriſtianity and the holy ſcriptures. And there is great reaſon to apprehend, that not a few have been unwarily led to entertain unhappy prejudices againſt revealed religion, and the authority of the ſcriptures, through too great an admiration of his Lordſhip's writings. Some inſtances of this kind have come under my own particular obſervation: and therefore it appeareth to me, upon the moſt mature conſideration, that I could not, in conſiſtency with the deſign I had in view, omit the making ſome obſervations upon that admired author, as far as the cauſe of Chriſtianity is concerned.

That part of my obſervations on Lord Shaftesbury's works which I find hath been particularly excepted againſt, is the account given of his ſentiments with regard to future rewards and puniſhments. It hath been urged, that his deſign in what he has written on this ſubject was, not to inſinuate that we ought not to be influenced by a regard to future rewards and puniſhments, the uſefulneſs of which he plainly acknowledgeth; but only to ſhew, that it is wrong to be actuated merely by a view to the reward, or by a fear of the puniſhment, without any real inward love to virtue, or any real hatred and abhorrence of vice. To this purpoſe his Lordſhip obſerves, that "to be bribed only, "or terrified into an honeſt practice, beſpeaks little of real "honeſty or worth; and that if virtue be not really eſtimable "in itſelf, he can ſee nothing eſtimable in following it for "the ſake of a bargain*." He aſks, "how ſhall we deny that

* Characteriſt. vol. i. p. 97.

"to

" to ſerve God by compulſion, or for intereſt merely, is ſervile, " and mercenary*?" And he puts the caſe of a perſon's being " incited by the hope of reward to do the good he hates, and " reſtrained by the fear of puniſhment from doing the ill to " which he is not otherwiſe in the leaſt degree averſe;" and obſerves, that " there is in this caſe no virtue whatſoever†." If his Lordſhip had ſaid no more than this, he would have ſaid no more than every real friend to Chriſtianity will allow; though in this caſe there would ſtill be great reaſon to complain, of his Lordſhip's having made a very unfair repreſentation of the ſenſe of thoſe divines, who think it neceſſary to urge the motives drawn from future rewards and puniſhments. It is true, that if the belief of future retributions ſhould have no other effect than the putting ſome reſtraint upon men's outward evil actions, and regulating their external behaviour, even this would be of great advantage to the community: but this is far from being the only or principal thing intended. Thoſe certainly muſt know little of the nature and tendency of the Chriſtian religion, who ſhould endeavour to perſuade themſelves or others, that though a man had a real love of vice in his heart, and only abſtained from ſome outward vicious practices for fear of puniſhment; and though he had an inward averſion to true goodneſs and virtue, and only performed ſome outward acts that had a fair appearance; this alone would denominate him a good man, and intitle him to the future reward: for this were to ſuppoſe, that though he were really a vicious and bad man, without that purity and ſincerity of heart on which the ſcriptures lay ſo great a ſtreſs, yet the practiſing ſome external acts of obedience, deſtitute of all true goodneſs, and of virtuous affections, would intitle him to the favour of God, and to that eternal happineſs which is promiſed in the goſpel. If any perſons ſhould teach this, I would readily join with his Lordſhip in condemning them. But he hath not contented himſelf with ſtriking at the ſuppoſed wrong ſentiments of divines, whom he loves on all occaſions to expoſe. There are ſeveral paſſages in his Lordſhip's writings, which appear to be directly intended to repreſent the inſiſting, ſo much as is done in the goſpel, upon the eternal rewards and puniſhments

* Characteriſt. vol. ii. p. 272. † Ibid. p. 55.

of

of a future ſtate, as having a bad influence on the moral temper, and particularly as tending to ſtrengthen an inordinate ſelfiſhneſs, and to diminiſh the affections towards public good, and to make men neglect what they owe to their friends, and to their country. He plainly intimates the diſadvantages accruing to virtue from the having *infinite rewards* in view, and that in that caſe the *common and natural motives to goodneſs are apt to be neglected, and loſe much by diſuſe**. He repreſents the being influenced by a regard to future rewards and puniſhments as at the beſt *diſingenuous, ſervile, and of the ſlaviſh kind;* and to this he oppoſes a *liberal ſervice*, and the *principle of love*, and the *loving God and virtue for God and virtue's ſake*†: and accordingly he determines, that thoſe duties, to which men are carried without any view to ſuch rewards, are for that reaſon more noble and excellent, and argue a higher degree of virtue. If the caſe really were as his Lordſhip is pleaſed to repreſent it, it muſt certainly give a very diſadvantageous idea of Chriſtianity; as if the inſiſting upon thoſe moſt important motives, drawn from a future eternal world, which our Saviour came to ſet in the ſtrongeſt light, tended to introduce and cheriſh a wrong temper of mind, narrow and ſelfiſh, diſingenuous and ſervile, to weaken our benevolent affections both public and private, and to take us off from the duties and offices of the civil and ſocial life. At that rate, it could not be ſaid that the goſpel is a friend to ſociety and to mankind; and inſtead of promoting the practice of true virtue, it would rather derogate from it, and degrade it from its proper dignity and excellence. It was therefore neceſſary to ſhew, as I endeavoured to do in my obſervations on Lord Shafteſbury's writings, that this is far from being a juſt repreſentation of the nature and tendency of the Chriſtian doctrine of future rewards and puniſhments. The moſt noble and extenſive benevolence, exerting itſelf in all proper effects and inſtances, in oppoſition to a narrow ſelfiſh diſpoſition, is what Chriſtianity every where recommendeth and enforceth in the moſt engaging manner; and it is its peculiar advantage, that it carrieth our views to a better

* Several paſſages to this purpoſe were produced out of the Characteriſtics in the preceding Letter, which I need not here repeat.

† See Characteriſtics, vol. ii. p. 271, 272, 273.

ſtate,

ſtate, where the benevolence which is now begun ſhall be completed, and ſhall be exerciſed in a more enlarged ſphere, and extend to a nobler ſociety. And can the hope of this poſſibly tend to diminiſh our benevolence, or muſt it not rather heighten and improve it? When a man hath a firm and ſteady perſuaſion, that the Supreme Being will reward his perſevering conſtancy in a virtuous courſe with everlaſting felicity, this, inſtead of weakening his inward affection to virtue, and his moral ſenſe of its worth and excellency, muſt in the nature of things greatly confirm and eſtabliſh it. There is therefore an entire conſiſtency between the loving virtue for its own ſake, *i. e.* as his Lordſhip explains it, *becauſe it is amiable in itſelf**, and the being animated to the purſuit and practice of it by ſuch rewards as the goſpel propoſeth: for it never appears more excellent and lovely, than when it is conſidered as recommending us to the favour and approbation of Him, who is the ſupreme original Goodneſs and Excellence, and as preparing us for a complete happineſs in a future ſtate, where it ſhall be raiſed to the higheſt degree of beauty and perfection. In like manner it muſt mightily ſtrengthen our abhorrence of vice, and our ſenſe of its turpitude and malignity, to conſider it as not only at preſent injurious and diſgraceful to our nature, but as an oppoſition to the will and law of the moſt wiſe and righteous Governor of the world, who will in a future ſtate of retribution inflict awful puniſhments upon thoſe who now obſtinately perſiſt in a preſumptuous courſe of vice and wickedneſs.

Our noble author himſelf, when he propoſeth to ſhew *what obligation there is to virtue, or what reaſon to embrace it*, which is the ſubject of the ſecond book of his *Inquiry*, reſolveth it into this: that *moral rectitude or virtue muſt be the advantage, and vice the miſery and diſadvantage of every creature;* and that *it is the creature's intereſt to be wholly good and virtuous*†. To prove this ſeems to be the entire deſign of that book, which he concludes with obſerving, that *virtue is the good, and vice the ill of every one.* He ſeems indeed, in diſplaying the advantages of the one and diſadvantages of the other, to confine himſelf wholly to this preſent life, and to abſtract from all conſideration of a future ſtate. But if the repreſenting virtue be to our intereſt

* Characteriſt. vol. ii. p. 67. † Ibid. p. 81. 98.

here

here on earth, and conducive to our preſent happineſs, be a juſt ground of *obligation to virtue*, and a proper *reaſon to embrace it*, which his ſecond book is deſigned to ſhew, then ſurely, if it can be proved, that it tendeth not only to our happineſs here, but to procure us a perfect happineſs in a future ſtate of exiſtence, this muſt mightily heighten the obligation to virtue, and ſtrengthen the reaſon for embracing it. If having regard to the preſent advantages of virtue be conſiſtent in his ſcheme with loving virtue for its own ſake, and as amiable in itſelf, and doth not render the embracing it a mercenary or ſlaviſh ſervice, why ſhould it be inconſiſtent with a liberal ſervice to be aſſured that it ſhall make us happy for ever? Or why ſhould they be accounted greater friends or admirers of virtue, who conſider its excellency only with regard to the narrow limits of this tranſitory life, than they who regard it as extending its beneficial influence to a nobler ſtate of exiſtence, and who believe that it ſhall flouriſh in unfading beauty and glory to eternity? That an affection in itſelf worthy and excellent ſhould grow leſs ſo, by conſidering it as ſo pleaſing to the Supreme Being, that he will reward it with everlaſting happineſs, and raiſe it to the higheſt perfection it is capable of in a future ſtate, would be a ſtrange way of reaſoning.

It was obſerved in the account given of the Earl of Shaftesbury's writings, in the preceding letter, that there are ſeveral paſſages in which he acknowledgeth, that the hope of future rewards, and fear of future puniſhments, is a great advantage, ſecurity, and ſupport to virtue. If theſe paſſages had been concealed or diſguiſed, there might have been juſt ground of complaint. But they were fairly laid before the reader, as well as thoſe that ſeemed to be of a contrary import, that he might be able to form a judgment of his Lordſhip's ſentiments, how far he is conſiſtent with himſelf, and whether the cenſures be well founded, which he paſſeth upon thoſe who inſiſt upon the rewards promiſed in the goſpel as powerful motives to virtue. He chargeth them as "reducing "religion to ſuch a philoſophy, as to leave no room for the prin"ciple of love—and as building a future ſtate on the ruins of vir"tue, and thereby betraying religion and the cauſe of God*." He repreſenteth them as if they were againſt a *liberal ſervice, flow-*

* Characteriſt. vol. ii. p. 272. 279.

ing

ing from an eſteem and love of God, or a *ſenſe of duty and gratitude*, and a *love of the dutiful and grateful part, as good and amiable in itſelf**. And he expreſsly declareth, that "the hope of "future reward, and fear of future puniſhment, cannot conſiſt in "reality with virtue or goodneſs, if it either ſtands as eſſential to "any moral performance, or as a *conſiderable motive* to any act, "of which ſome better affection ought alone to be a ſufficient "cauſe†." Here he ſeems not willing to allow, that the regard to future retributions ought to be ſo much as a *conſiderable motive* to well-doing; and aſſerteth, that to be influenced by it as ſuch a motive cannot conſiſt in reality with virtue or goodneſs. This is in effect to ſay, that we ought not to be influenced by a regard to future rewards and puniſhments at all: for if they be believed and regarded at all, they muſt be a conſiderable motive; ſince, as he himſelf obſerves, where infinite rewards are firmly believed, they muſt needs have a mighty influence, and will overbalance other motives‡. If therefore it be inconſiſtent with true virtue or goodneſs, to be influenced by them as a conſiderable motive, it is wrong to propoſe them to mankind: for why ſhould they be propoſed, or to what purpoſe believed, if it be inconſiſtent with true goodneſs to be influenced by them in proportion to their worth or importance? His Lordſhip elſewhere obſerves, "that, by making rewards and puniſhments" (*i. e.* the rewards and puniſhments propoſed in the goſpel; for to theſe he evidently refers) "the principal motives to duty, the Chriſtian religion in "particular is overthrown, and the greateſt principle, that of "love, rejected§." When he here brings ſo heavy a charge againſt thoſe who make the rewards of the goſpel their *principal motives*, his meaning ſeems to be this: That they make the hope of future eternal happineſs a more powerful motive than the preſent ſatisfaction and advantages virtue hath a tendency to produce, which are the motives he ſo largely inſiſts upon, and which he calls *the common and natural motives to goodneſs*. And is the being more animated by the conſideration of that eternal happineſs which is the promiſed reward of virtue, than by any of the advantages it yields in this preſent ſtate (though theſe alſo

* Characteriſt. vol. ii. p. 270.
† Ibid. p. 58.
‡ Ibid. p. 68.
§ Ibid. p. 279.

are

are allowed to have their proper weight and influence) ſo great a fault, as to deſerve to be repreſented as a ſubverting of all religion, and particularly the Chriſtian? If the eternal life promiſed in the goſpel be rightly underſtood, the hope of it includeth a due regard to the glory of God, to our own higheſt happineſs, and to the excellence of virtue and true holineſs; all which are here united, and are the worthieſt motives that can be propoſed to the human mind. There is a perfect harmony between this hope, and what his Lordſhip ſo much extols, the principle of divine love, *ſuch as ſeparates from every thing worldly, ſenſual, and meanly intereſted:* nor can it be juſtly ſaid, concerning this hope of the goſpel reward, what he ſaith of *a violent affection towards private good*, that the more there is of it, *the leſs room there is for an affection towards goodneſs itſelf, or any good and deſerving object*, worthy of *love and admiration for its own ſake, ſuch as God is univerſally acknowledged to be**. The very reward itſelf includeth the perfection of love and goodneſs; and the happineſs promiſed principally conſiſteth in a conformity to God, and in the fruition of him; and therefore the being powerfully animated with the hope of it is perfectly conſiſtent with *the higheſt love and admiration of the Deity, on account of his own infinite excellency.*

It appeareth to me, upon conſidering and comparing what hath been produced out of Lord Shafteſbury's writings, that though his Lordſhip's good ſenſe would not allow him abſolutely to deny the uſefulneſs of believing future retributions, yet he hath in effect endeavoured on ſeveral occaſions to caſt a ſlur upon Chriſtianity, for propoſing and inſiſting upon what he calls *infinite rewards:* and thus he hath attempted to turn that to its diſadvantage which is its greateſt glory, *viz.* its ſetting the important retributions of a future ſtate in the cleareſt and ſtrongeſt light, and teaching us to raiſe our affections and views to things inviſible and eternal. His Lordſhip hath, upon the moſt careful and diligent reviſal of his works, ſuffered thoſe obnoxious paſſages ſtill to continue there. Nor will any man wonder at this, who conſidereth the deſign and tendency of many other paſſages in his writings: That he hath taken occaſion to ridicule the ſpirit of

* Characteriſtics, vol. ii. p. 58, 59.

 prophecy,

prophecy, and to burleſque ſeveral paſſages of holy writ: That he hath repreſented the ſcriptures as abſolutely uncertain, and the important facts by which Chriſtianity is atteſted, as not to be depended upon: That he hath inſinuated injurious reflections upon the character and intentions of the bleſſed Founder of our holy religion: That he hath repreſented our faith in the goſpel as having no other foundation than the authority of the ſtate; and hath hinted, that it could hardly have ſtood the teſt of ridicule, and even of *Bartholomew-Fair drollery*, had it been applied to it at its firſt appearance*.

As I have been engaged ſo far in an examination of Lord Shafteſbury's writings, I ſhall take this occaſion to make ſome farther obſervations on his celebrated *Inquiry concerning Virtue.*

He ſets out with obſerving, that "religion and virtue appear "to be ſo nearly related, that they are generally preſumed inſe- "parable companions: but that the practice of the world does "not ſeem in this reſpect to be anſwerable to our ſpeculations:" That "many who have had the appearance of great zeal in reli- "gion, have yet wanted the common affections of *humanity*†: "Others again, who have been conſidered as mere atheiſts, have "yet been obſerved to practiſe the rules of morality, and act in "many caſes with ſuch good meaning and affection towards "mankind, as might ſeem to force an acknowledgment of their "being virtuous‡." His Lordſhip therefore propoſeth to inquire, "What honeſty or virtue is, conſidered by itſelf, and in what "manner it is influenced by religion: how far religion neceſſarily "implies virtue: and whether it be a true ſaying, that it is im- "poſſible for an atheiſt to be virtuous, or ſhare any real degree "of honeſty and merit§."

In that part of the *Inquiry*, in which he propoſeth to ſhew what virtue is, he ſeems to make it properly conſiſt in good affections towards mankind, or in a man's having "his diſpoſition of mind "and temper ſuitable and agreeing to the good of his kind, or of

* See all this clearly ſhewn, p. 63, & ſeq.

† It will readily be acknowledged, that the appearance of religion is often ſeparated from true virtue: but real practical religion neceſſarily comprehendeth virtue; and as far as we are deficient in the practice of virtue, we are deficient in what religion indiſpenſibly requireth of us.

‡ Characteriſt. vol. ii. p. 5, 6. § Ibid. p. 7.

" the ſyſtem in which he is included, and of which he conſtituteth " a part*." And he had before declared, that ſome who have been conſidered as mere atheiſts have acted with ſuch good affection towards mankind, as might ſeem to force an acknowledgment that they are virtuous.

And as this is the notion his Lordſhip gives of the nature of virtue; ſo when he treats of the obligation to virtue, and the reaſon there is to embrace it, which is the ſubject of the ſecond book of the *Inquiry*, he ſeems to place it in its tendency to promote our happineſs in this preſent life, without taking any notice of a future ſtate.

Accordingly, many have looked upon the *Inquiry* as deſigned to ſet up ſuch a notion of virtue and its obligations, as is independent on religion, and may ſubſiſt without it. And in the progreſs of that *Inquiry*, his Lordſhip takes occaſion to compare atheiſm with ſuperſtition or falſe religion, and plainly gives the former the preference; and ſeems ſometimes to ſpeak tenderly of it. Having obſerved, that nothing can poſſibly, in a rational creature, exclude a principle of virtue, or render it ineffectual, except what either, " 1. Takes away the natural and juſt ſenſe " of right and wrong: 2. Or creates a wrong ſenſe of it: 3. Or " cauſes the right ſenſe of it to be oppoſed by contrary affec- " tions†:" As to the firſt caſe, the taking away the natural ſenſe of right and wrong, he will not allow that atheiſm, or any ſpeculative opinion, perſuaſion, or belief, is capable immediately or directly to exclude or deſtroy it; and that it can do it no other way than *indirectly* by the intervention of oppoſite affections, *caſually* excited by ſuch belief‡. As to the ſecond caſe, the *wrong ſenſe*, or *falſe imagination of right and wrong*, he ſays, that, " however atheiſm may be indirectly an occaſion " of men's loſing a good and ſufficient ſenſe of right and wrong, " it will not, as atheiſm merely, be the occaſion of ſetting up a " falſe ſpecies of it; which only falſe religion, or fantaſtical " opinion, derived immediately from ſuperſtition and credulity, " is able to effect§." As to the third caſe, which renders a principle of virtue ineffectual, *viz.* its being oppoſed by contrary

* See Characteriſt. vol. ii. p. 31. 77, 78. 86, 87, & paſſim.
† Ibid. p. 40. ‡ Ibid. p. 44, 45. § Ibid. p. 46. 51, 52.

affections,

affections, he ſays, that "atheiſm, though it be plainly deficient, "and without remedy, in the caſe of ill judgment on the happi- "neſs of virtue, yet it is not indeed of neceſſity the cauſe of ſuch "ill judgment: for without an abſolute aſſent to any hypotheſis "of theiſm, the advantages of virtue may poſſibly be ſeen and "owned, and a high opinion of it eſtabliſhed in the mind*."

Our noble author was ſenſible of the offence he had given, by ſeeming to ſpeak favourably of atheiſts, and by erecting a ſyſtem of virtue independent of religion, or the belief of a Deity; and in a treatiſe he publiſhed ſome years after the *Inquiry*, intituled, *The Moraliſts, a Philoſophical Rhapſody*, makes an apology for it: That "he has endeavoured to keep the faireſt meaſures he could "with men of this ſort," (*viz.* atheiſtical perſons, and men of no religion) "alluring them all he was able, and arguing with a "perfect indifferency even on the ſubject of a Deity; having "this one chief aim and intention, how in the firſt place to re- "concile thoſe perſons to the principles of virtue; that by this "means a way might be laid open to religion, by removing "thoſe greateſt, if not only obſtacles to it, which ariſe from the "vices and paſſions of men: That it is upon this account chiefly "he endeavours to eſtabliſh virtue upon principles by which he "is able to argue with thoſe, who are not yet inclined to own a "God, or future ſtate.—He owns, he has made virtue his chief "ſubject, and in ſome meaſure independent on religion; yet he "fancies he may poſſibly appear at laſt as high a divine as he is a "moraliſt:"—And ſays, "He will venture to affirm, that who- "ſoever ſincerely defends virtue, and is a realiſt in morality, "muſt of neceſſity in a manner, by the ſame ſcheme of reaſon- "ing, prove as very a realiſt in divinity†." And elſewhere he ſays, that "we may juſtly as well as charitably conclude, that "it was his deſign, in applying himſelf to the men of looſer prin- "ciples, to lead them into ſuch an apprehenſion of the conſtitu- "tion of mankind, and of human affairs, as might form in them "a notion of order in things, and draw hence an acknowledg- "ment of the wiſdom, goodneſs, and beauty, which is Supreme; "that being thus far become proſelytes, they might be prepared "for that divine love which our religion would teach them,

* Characteriſt. vol. ii. p. 69. † Ibid. p. 266, 267, 268.

" when once they ſhould embrace it, and form themſelves to its " ſacred character*."

This muſt be owned to be a handſome apology: ſo that if we take his Lordſhip's own account of his intention in his *Inquiry*, it was not to favour atheiſm, but rather to reclaim men from it; to reconcile atheiſts to the principles of virtue, and thereby bring them to a good opinion of religion. It may no doubt be of real ſervice to the intereſts of virtue, to endeavour to make men ſenſible of its great excellence in itſelf, and its preſent natural advantages, which his Lordſhip ſets forth at large, and in a very elegant manner: and this is no more than hath been often repreſented by thoſe divines, who yet think it neceſſary to inſiſt on the rewards and puniſhments of a future ſtate. There are indeed many that have ſaid, what no man who knows the world and the hiſtory of mankind can deny, that in the preſent ſituation of human affairs, a ſteady adherence to virtue often ſubjects a man to ſevere trials and ſufferings; and that it frequently happeneth, that bad and vicious men are in very proſperous outward circumſtances; but I ſcarce know any that have maintained what his Lordſhip calls that *unfortunate opinion*, viz. that " virtue is *naturally* an enemy to happineſs in life;" or who ſuppoſe, that " virtue is the *natural ill*, and vice the *natural* " *good* of any creature†." Nor would any friend to Chriſtianity have found fault with his Lordſhip's endeavouring to ſhew, that by the very frame of the human conſtitution, virtue has a friendly influence to promote our ſatisfaction and happineſs, even in this preſent life; and that vice has naturally a contrary tendency. But certainly it was no way neceſſary to his deſign, ſuppoſing it to have been, as he profeſſes, to ſerve the cauſe of virtue in the world, to throw out ſo many inſinuations as he has done againſt the being influenced by a regard to future rewards and puniſhments; as if it argued a higher degree of virtue to have no regard to them at all. And though in ſeveral paſſages he ſhews the advantage which ariſes to virtue from religion and the belief of a deity, yet whilſt he ſeems to allow that virtue may ſubſiſt, and even be carried to a conſiderable degree without it, I am afraid it will give encouragement to thoſe he calls *the men of looſer*

* Characteriſtics, p. 279. † Ibid. p. 71, 72.

principles;

principles; and that inſtead of reclaiming them from atheiſm, it will tend to make them eaſy in it, by leading them to think they may be good and virtuous men without any religion at all.

His Lordſhip ſeems, from a deſire of *keeping the faireſt meaſures*, as he expreſſes it, *with men of this ſort*, to have carried his complaiſance too far, when he aſſerts, that atheiſm has no direct tendency either to take away and deſtroy *the natural and juſt ſenſe of right and wrong*, or to the ſetting up *a falſe ſpecies of it*. This is not a proper place to enter into a diſtinct conſideration of this ſubject. I ſhall content myſelf with producing ſome paſſages from the moſt applauded doctor of modern atheiſm, Spinoſa, and who hath taken the moſt pains to form it into a ſyſtem. He propoſeth, in the fifteenth chapter of his *Tractatus Theologico-politicus*, to treat of *the natural and civil right of every man. De jure uniuſcujuſque naturali & civili.* And the ſum of his doctrine is this; that every man has a natural right to do whatever he has power to do, and his inclination prompts him to; and that the right extends as far as the force. By *natural right, or law, jus et inſtitutum naturæ*, "he underſtands nothing elſe "but the rules of the nature of each individual; according to "which it is determined to exiſt and act after a certain manner *."

And

* Per jus & inſtitutum naturæ nihil aliud intelligo, quam regulas naturæ uniuſcujuſque individui, ſecundum quas unumquodque naturaliter determinatum concipimus ad certo modo exiſtendum & operandum. Ex. gr. piſces a natura determinati ſunt ad natandum, magni ad minores comedendum, adeoque piſces ſummo naturali jure aqua potiuntur, & magni minores comedunt —" Sequitur unumquodque individuum jus ſummum habere ad omnia quæ poteſt.—Nec hic ullam agnoſcimus differentiam inter homines & reliqua naturæ individua, neque inter homines ratione præditos, & inter alios qui veram rationem ignorant, neque inter fatuos, delirantes, & ſanos." Quare inter homines quamdiu ſub imperio ſolius naturæ vivere conſiderantur, tam ille qui rationem nondum novit, vel qui virtutis habitum nondum habet, ex ſolis legibus appetitus ſummo jure vivit, quam ille qui ex legibus rationis vitam ſuam dirigit. Hoc eſt, ſicuti ſapiens jus ſummum habet ad omnia quæ ratio dictitat, ſive ex legibus rationis vivendi; ſic etiam ignarus et animi impotens ſummum jus habet ad omnia quæ appetitus ſuadet, ſive ex legibus appetitus vivendi. Jus itaque naturale uniuſcujuſque hominis, non ſana ratione, ſed cupiditate et potentia determinatur—Quicquid itaque unuſquiſque qui ſub ſolo naturæ imperio conſideratur, ſibi utile vel ductu ſanæ rationis, vel ex affectuum impetu judicat, id ſummo naturæ jure appetere, et quacum-

And after having obſerved, that "the large fiſhes are determined "by nature to devour the ſmaller, and that therefore they have a "natural right to do ſo," and that "every individual has the "*higheſt right* to do all things which it has power to do;" he declares, that "in this caſe he acknowledges no difference be- "tween men and other individuals of nature, nor between men "that make a right uſe of their reaſon and thoſe that do not ſo; "nor between wiſe men and fools: That he who does not yet "know reaſon, or has not attained to a habit of virtue, hath as "much the higheſt natural right to live according to the ſole laws "of appetite, and to do what that inclines him to, as he that di- "rects his life by the rules of reaſon hath to live according to rea- "ſon." Accordingly, he directly aſſerts, "that the natural "right of every man is determined not by ſound reaſon, but by "inclination, or appetite and power: That therefore whatever "any man, conſidered as under the ſole government of nature, "judges to be uſeful for himſelf, whether led by ſound reaſon, or "prompted by his paſſions, he has the higheſt natural right to "endeavour to procure it for himſelf any way he can, whether "by force or fraud; and conſequently to hold him for an enemy, "who would hinder him from gratifying his inclination; and "that from hence it follows, that the right and law of nature, "under which all are born, and for the moſt part live, only "prohibits that which a man does not deſire, or which is out of "his power; nor is it averſe to contentions, hatred, wrath, de-

que ratione, ſive vi, ſive dolo, ſive precibus, ſive quocunque demum modo facilius poterit, ipſe capere licet, et conſequenter pro hoſte habere eum, qui impedire vult, quo minus animum expleat ſuum. Ex quibus ſequitur jus et inſtitutum naturæ ſub quo omnes naſcuntur, et maxima ex parte vivunt, nihil niſi quod nemo cupit, et nemo poteſt, prohibere; non contentiones, non odia, non iram, non dolos, nec abſolute aliquid quod appetitus ſuadet, averſari. Nec mirum, nam natura non legibus humanæ rationis, quæ non niſi verum utile et converſationem intendunt, ſed infinitis aliis, quæ totius naturæ, cujus homo particula eſt, æternum ordinem reſpiciunt: ex cujus ſola neceſſitate, omnia individua certo modo determinantur ad exiſtendum et operandum.—Oſtendimus jus naturale ſola potentia cujuſque determinari.—Nemo, niſi promiſſo aliud accedat, de fide alterius poteſt eſſe certus, quandoquidem unuſquiſque naturæ jure dolo agere poteſt; nec pactis ſtare tenetur, niſi ſpe majoris boni, vel metu majoris mali.—Tract. Theolog. Polit. cap. xvi.

"ceit,

" ceit, or to any thing that the appetite puts him upon. And no " wonder; for nature is not confined within the laws of human " reaſon, which only intend the true benefit of mankind, but " depends upon infinite other things which reſpect the eternal " order of univerſal nature, of which man is only a minute part; " from the neceſſity of which alone all individuals are determined " to exiſt and operate after a certain manner." He often repeats it in that chapter, that " natural right is only determined by the " power of every individual." And he expreſsly aſſerts, that " no man can be ſure of another man's fidelity, except he think " it his intereſt to keep his promiſe; ſince every man has a na- " tural right to act by fraud or deceit, nor is obliged to ſtand to " his engagements, but from the hope of greater good, or fear " of greater ill."

I think it muſt be owned, that theſe principles have not merely an *indirect* and *caſual*, but a plain and direct tendency, to take away or pervert the natural ſenſe of *right* and *wrong*, or to introduce a falſe ſpecies of it, if the ſubſtituting power and inclination inſtead of reaſon and juſtice can be accounted ſo. This is to argue conſequentially from atheiſm, when all things are reſolved into nature and eternal neceſſity, by which are underſtood the neceſſary effects of matter and motion. Spinoſa indeed owns, that it is more profitable to live according to the dictates of reaſon, or the preſcriptions of the civil laws, than merely according to appetite or natural right. But whilſt men think they have the higheſt natural right to do whatever they have power to do, and inclination prompts them to, civil laws will be but feeble ties, and bind a man no farther than when he has not power, or thinks it not for his intereſt to break them. Virtue and vice, fidelity and fraud, are on a level: the one equally founded in natural right as the other: and how any man can be truly virtuous upon this ſcheme I cannot ſee.

It appears to me therefore, that, inſtead of endeavouring to ſhew that virtue may ſubſiſt without religion, or the belief of a God and a future ſtate, one of the moſt important ſervices that can be done to mankind is to ſhew the cloſe connection there is between religion and virtue or good order, and that the latter cannot be maintained without the former. And this indeed plainly follows from ſome of the principles laid down by our noble author in his *Inquiry*.

Although he ſeems to have intended to ſhew, that an atheiſt may be really virtuous; and obſerves, in a paſſage cited above, that, without the belief of a Deity, "the advantages of virtue "may poſſibly be ſeen and owned, and a high opinion of it eſ-"tabliſhed in the mind," he there adds, "however it muſt be "confeſſed, that the natural tendency of atheiſm is very differ-"ent*:" Where he ſeems plainly to allow, that atheiſm is *naturally* an enemy to virtue, and that the direct tendency of it is to hinder the mind from entertaining a right opinion of virtue, or from having a due ſenſe of its advantages. And elſewhere, ſpeaking of the atheiſtical belief, he obſerves, that it "tends to "the weaning the affections from every thing amiable and ſelf-"worthy: for how little diſpoſed muſt a perſon be to love or "admire any thing as orderly in the univerſe, who thinks the "univerſe itſelf a pattern of diſorder†!" To this may be added another remarkable paſſage, in which his Lordſhip declares, that "he who only doubts of a God may poſſibly lament his own un-"happineſs, and wiſh to be convinced: but that he who denies "a Deity is daringly preſumptuous, and ſets up an opinion againſt "the ſentiments of mankind, and being of ſociety:" Where he ſeems plainly to pronounce, that atheiſm is ſubverſive of all virtue, which in his ſcheme hath an eſſential relation to ſociety, and the good of the public. And accordingly he adds, "that it is eaſily "ſeen, that one of theſe" (*viz.* he that only doubts) "may "bear a due reſpect to the magiſtrates and laws, but not the other," (*viz.* he that denies a Deity), "who being obnoxious to them is "juſtly puniſhable‡."

Several paſſages might be produced, in which his Lordſhip repreſents the tendency religion hath to promote virtue. He obſerves, that "nothing can more highly contribute to the fixing of "right apprehenſions, and a ſound judgment or ſenſe of right and "wrong, than to believe a God, who is repreſented ſuch, as to "be a true model or example of the moſt exact juſtice, and higheſt "goodneſs and worth§!" And again, that "this belief muſt "undoubtedly ſerve to raiſe and increaſe the affection towards "virtue, and help to ſubmit and ſubdue all other affections to "this alone.—And that, when this theiſtical belief is intire and

* Characteriſt. vol. ii. p. 69.
† Ibid. p. 70.
‡ Ibid. p. 260.
§ Ibid. p. 51.

"perfect,

" perfect, there muſt be a ſteady opinion of the ſuperintendency " of a Supreme Being, a witneſs and ſpectator of human life, and " conſcious of whatſoever is felt or acted in the univerſe; ſo that " in the perfecteſt receſs, or deepeſt ſolitude, there muſt be one " ſtill preſumed remaining with us, whoſe preſence ſingly muſt " be of more moment than that of the moſt auguſt aſſembly upon " earth: and that in ſuch a preſence, as the *ſhame* of guilty ac- " tions muſt be the greateſt of any, ſo muſt the honour be of " well-doing, even under the unjuſt cenſures of a world. And " in this caſe it is very apparent, how conducing a perfect theiſm " muſt be to virtue, and how great a deficiency there is in athe- " iſm*." He ſhews, that " where by the violence of rage, " luſt, or any other counter-working paſſions, the good affection " may frequently be controuled and overcome—if religion inter- " poſing creates a belief, that the ill paſſions of this kind, no leſs " than their conſequent actions, are the objects of a Deity's ani- " madverſion; it is certain, that ſuch a belief muſt prove a ſea- " ſonable remedy againſt vice, and be in a particular manner " advantageous to virtue†. And he concludes the firſt book of the *Inquiry concerning Virtue* with obſerving, that " we may " hence determine juſtly the relation which virtue has to piety: " the firſt not being complete but in the latter. And thus," ſaith he, " the perfection and height of virtue muſt be owing to the " belief of a God‡.

From theſe paſſages it ſufficiently appears, that thoſe who would ſeparate virtue from religion cannot properly plead Lord Shafteſbury's authority for it. And indeed not only is religion a friend to virtue, and of the higheſt advantage to it, but as it ſignifies proper affections and diſpoſitions towards the Supreme Being, is itſelf the nobleſt virtue. It is true, that his Lordſhip ſeems frequently to place virtue wholly in good affections towards mankind. But this appears to be too narrow a notion of it. He himſelf makes *virtue* and *moral rectitude* to be equivalent terms§; and moral rectitude ſeems as evidently and neceſſarily to include right affections towards God, as towards thoſe of our own ſpecies. He that is deficient in this, muſt certainly be deficient in an eſ-

* Characteriſt. vol. ii. p. 57.
† Ibid. p. 60, 61.
‡ Ibid. p. 76.
§ Ibid. p. 77. 81.

ſential

ſential branch of good affection, or moral rectitude. If a human creature could not be ſaid to be rightly diſpoſed, that was deſtitute of affections towards its natural parents, can he be ſaid to be rightly diſpoſed, who hath not a due affection towards the *Common Parent*, as Lord Shafteſbury calls him, of all intellectual beings? This noble writer deſcribes virtue to be that which is beautiful, fair, and amiable in diſpoſition and action. And he aſks, "Whether there is on earth a fairer matter of ſpeculation, "a goodlier view or contemplation, than that of a *beautiful, pro-* "*portioned*, and *becoming* action*?" And is there any thing more beautiful, more juſtly proportioned, and more becoming, than the acting ſuitably to the relation we bear to the Supreme Being, and the ſerving, adoring, and honouring him, as far as we are capable of doing ſo? Is there ſuch a beauty and harmony in good affections towards thoſe of our own ſpecies, and muſt there not be ſtill more beauty and excellency in having our minds formed to proper affections and diſpoſitions towards our Maker, Preſerver, and Benefactor, the *ſource and principle*, to uſe our author's expreſſions, *of all being and perfection, the ſupreme and ſovereign beauty, the original of all which is good and amiable?* His Lordſhip ſpeaks in the higheſt terms of the pleaſing conſciouſneſs which is the effect of love or kind affections towards mankind. But certainly there is nothing that can yield more of a divine ſatisfaction, than that which ariſeth from a conſciouſneſs of a man's having approved himſelf to the beſt of beings, and endeavoured to promote his glory in the world, and to fulfil the work he hath given us to do. And it will be readily acknowledged, that a neceſſary part of this work is the doing good to our fellow creatures.

The very notion he ſo frequently gives of virtue, as having an eſſential relation to a ſyſtem, ſeems, if underſtood in its proper extent, to include religion, and cannot ſubſiſt without it. His Lordſhip indeed frequently explains this as relating to the ſyſtem of the human ſpecies, to which we are particularly related, and of which we conſtitute a part. But he alſo repreſents the human ſyſtem as only a part of the univerſal one, and obſerves, that "as man muſt be conſidered as having a relation abroad to the

* Characteriſt. vol. ii. p. 105.

"ſyſtem

" ſyſtem of his kind; ſo even the ſyſtem of his kind to the animal " ſyſtem: this to the world (our earth), and this again to the big- " ger world, the univerſe*." And that " having recognized " this uniform conſiſtent fabric, and owned the univerſal ſyſtem; " we muſt of conſequence acknowledge an univerſal mind†." He aſſerts, that " good affection, in order to its being of the right " kind, muſt be *intire*:" and that " a partial affection, or ſocial " love in part, without regard to a complete ſociety or whole, is " in itſelf an inconſiſtency, and implies an abſolute contradic- " tion‡." But how can that affection to the ſyſtem be ſaid to be intire, or of the right kind, which hath no regard to the author of it, on whom the whole ſyſtem, the order, and even the very being of it, abſolutely depends? and without whom indeed there could be properly no ſyſtem at all, nothing but diſorder and confuſion? On this occaſion it will be proper to produce a remarkable paſſage in his third volume; where he obſerves, that " if " what he had advanced in his *Inquiry*, and in his following " *Philoſophic Dialogue*, be real, it will follow, that ſince man is ſo " conſtituted by means of his rational part, as to be conſcious of " this his more immediate relation to the univerſal ſyſtem, and " principle of order and intelligence, he is not only by nature " *ſociable* within the limits of his own ſpecies or kind, but in a " yet more generous and extenſive manner. He is not only born " to virtue, friendſhip, honeſty, and faith, but to piety, adoration, " and a generous ſurrender of his mind to whatever happens " from the *Supreme Cauſe* or order of things, which he acknow- " ledges intirely juſt and perfect§."

I have inſiſted the more largely upon this, becauſe many there are among us that talk highly of virtue, who yet ſeem to look upon religion to be a thing in which they have little or no concern. They allow that men are formed and deſigned to be uſeful to one another; but as to what is uſually called piety towards God, or thoſe acts of religion of which God is the immediate object, this does not enter at all into their notion of virtue or morality. They ſlight it as a matter of no conſequence; and think they may be good and virtuous without it. But not to

* Characteriſt. vol. ii. p. 286.
† Ibid. p. 290.
‡ Ibid. p. 110. 113, 114.
§ Ibid. vol. iii. p. 224.

urge,

urge, that religion or a true regard to the deity is the beſt ſecurity for the right performance of every other part of our duty, and furniſheth the ſtrongeſt motives and engagements to it (which certainly ought greatly to recommend it to every lover of virtue), there is nothing which ſeems to be capable of a clearer demonſtration, from the frame of the human nature, and the powers and faculties with which man is endued, than that he alone, of all the ſpecies of beings in this lower world, is formed with a capacity for religion; and that conſequently this was one principal deſign of his creation, and without which he cannot properly anſwer the end of his being. To what hath been produced from the Earl of Shafteſbury, I ſhall add the teſtimony of another writer, whom no man will ſuſpect of being prejudiced in favour of religion, the late Lord Viſcount Bolingbroke: who, though he ſometimes ſeems to make man only a higher kind of brute, and blames thoſe who ſuppoſe that the ſoul of man was made to *contemplate God*, yet at other times finds himſelf obliged to acknowledge, that man was principally deſigned and formed for religion. Thus, in the ſpecimen he gives of a meditation or ſoliloquy of a devout theiſt, he talks of feeling the ſuperiority of his ſpecies; and adds, "I ſhould rouſe in myſelf a grateful "ſenſe of theſe advantages above all others, that I am a creature "capable of knowing, of adoring, and worſhipping my Creator, "capable of diſcovering his will in the law of my nature, and "capable of promoting my happineſs by obeying it*." And in another paſſage, after inveighing, as is uſual with him, againſt the pride and vanity of philoſophers and divines, in exalting man and flattering the pride of the human heart, he thinks fit to acknowledge, that "man is a *religious* as well as *ſocial* crea-"ture, made to know and adore his Creator, to diſcover and to "obey his will: That greater powers of reaſon, and means of im-"provement, have been meaſured out to us than to other ani-"mals, that we might be able to fulfil the *ſuperior* purpoſes of "our *deſtination, whereof religion is undoubtedly the chief:* "And that in theſe the elevation and pre-eminence of our ſpe-"cies over the inferior animals conſiſt†." I think it plainly

* Lord Bolingbroke's Works, vol. v. p. 390, 391. See alſo to the ſame purpoſe, ibid. p. 340. † Ibid. p. 470.

followeth

followeth, from what Lord Bolingbroke hath here obſerved, and which ſeems to be perfectly juſt and reaſonable, that they who live in an habitual neglect of religion, are chargeable with neglecting the chief purpoſe of their being, and that in which the true glory and pre-eminence of the human nature doth principally conſiſt: and that conſequently they are guilty of a very criminal conduct, and which they can by no means approve to the great author of their exiſtence, who gave them their noble powers, and to whom, as the wiſe and righteous Governor of the world, they muſt be accountable for their conduct.

I have been carried farther in my obſervations on this ſubject than I intended; but if this may be looked upon as a digreſſion, I hope it will not be thought unſuitable to the main deſign I have in view.

I am, Sir, &c.

LETTER VII.

Mr. Collins's Diſcourſe of Free-thinking—*He gives a long Catalogue of Diviſions among the Clergy, with a View to ſhew the Uncertainty of the Chriſtian Religion—His Attempt to prove that there was a general Corruption of the Goſpels in the ſixth Century—The Abſurdity of this manifeſted—His Pretence that Friendſhip is not required in the Goſpel, though ſtrongly recommended by Epicurus, ſhewn to be vain and groundleſs—An Account of his Book, intitled,* The Grounds and Reaſons of the Chriſtian Religion—*The pernicious Deſign and Tendency of that Book ſhewn—He allows Chriſtianity no Foundation but the allegorical,* i. e. *as he underſtands it, the falſe Senſe of the Old Teſtament Prophecies—His Method unfair and diſingenuous—Some Account of the principal Anſwers publiſhed againſt that Book, and againſt the* Scheme of Literal Prophecy conſidered, *which was deſigned to be a Defence of it.*

SIR,

IN the year 1713 came out a remarkable treatiſe, which it will be neceſſary to take ſome notice of, intitled, *A Diſcourſe of Free-thinking, occaſioned by the Riſe and Growth of a Sect called Free-thinkers.* It was written by Anthony Collins, Eſq. though publiſhed, as his other writings are, without his name. The ſame gentleman had in 1707 publiſhed an *Eſſay concerning the Uſe of Reaſon in Propoſitions, the Evidence whereof depends upon human Teſtimony:* in which there are ſome good obſervations, mixed with others of a ſuſpicious nature and tendency. In this eſſay there are animadverſions upon ſome paſſages in a tract written by Dr. Francis Gaſtrel, afterwards Lord Biſhop of Cheſter, intitled, *Some Conſiderations concerning the Trinity, and the Way of managing that Controverſy*, publiſhed in 1702. To the third edition of which, publiſhed in 1707, that learned and judicious divine ſubjoined a vindication of it, in anſwer to Mr. Collins's eſſay. This gentleman alſo diſtinguiſhed himſelf by writing againſt the immateriality and immortality of the human ſoul,

as

as he afterwards did againſt human liberty and free agency; and with regard to both theſe, was anſwered by Dr. Samuel Clarke, with that clearneſs and ſtrength for which that author was ſo remarkable. The *Diſcourſe of Free-thinking* is profeſſedly intended to demonſtrate the neceſſity and uſefulneſs of free-thinking, from reaſon, and from the examples of the beſt and wiſeſt men in all ages. But there is great reaſon to complain of a very unfair and diſingenuous procedure throughout the whole book. He all along inſinuates, that thoſe who ſtand up for revealed religion are enemies to a juſt liberty of thought, and to a free examination and inquiry. His deſign is certainly levelled againſt Chriſtianity, and yet he ſometimes affects to ſpeak of it with reſpect. He nowhere argues directly againſt it, but takes every occaſion to throw out ſneers and inſinuations, which tend to raiſe prejudices in the minds of his readers. No ſmall part of this book is taken up in invectives againſt the clergy, and in giving an account of the diviſions that have been among them about the articles of the Chriſtian faith. If there hath been any thing unwarily advanced by any of them, if they have vented any odd or abſurd opinions, or have in the heat of diſpute caſt raſh and angry cenſures upon one another, theſe things are here turned to the diſadvantage of Chriſtianity itſelf: as if this excellent religion were to be anſwerable for all the paſſions, follies, and exorbitancies of thoſe that make profeſſion of it: or, as if the differences which have been among Chriſtians were a proof, that there is nothing in the Chriſtian religion that can be ſafely depended upon. This indeed has been a ſtanding topic for declamation in all the deiſtical writings, though it is founded upon a principle which is manifeſtly falſe, *viz.* that whatever has been at any time controverted is doubtful and uncertain: a principle which, as I had occaſion to obſerve before, would ſet aſide the moſt important truths of natural religion as well as revealed. But theſe gentlemen too often act, as if they were not very ſolicitous about the former, provided they could deſtroy the latter with it.

A great noiſe is raiſed in this *Diſcourſe of Free-thinking*, about the pious frauds of ancient fathers and modern clergy, and their forging, corrupting, and mangling of authors; and it is inſinuated, that they have altered and corrupted the Scriptures, as beſt ſerved their own purpoſes and intereſts. Lord Shafteſbury had

inſinuated

inſinuated the ſame thing before; and theſe clamours are continually renewed and repeated, though it hath been often ſhewn with the utmoſt evidence, that a general alteration and corruption of the holy Scriptures was, as the caſe was circumſtanced, an impoſſible thing. And we have the plaineſt proof in fact, that even in the darkeſt and moſt corrupt ages of the Chriſtian church, the Scriptures were not altered in favour of the corruptions and abuſes which were then introduced; ſince no traces of thoſe corruptions are to be found there: on the contrary, they furniſh the moſt convincing arguments for detecting and expoſing thoſe corruptions.

But what he ſeems to lay the greateſt ſtreſs upon, is a paſſage from Victor of Tmuis, in which it is ſaid, that at the command of the emperor Anaſtaſius, the holy goſpels were corrected and amended. This our author calls *an account of a general alteration of the four goſpels in the ſixth century:* and he ſays, it was diſcovered by Dr. Mills, and was very little known before*. But then he ſhould have taken notice of what Dr. Mills has added, *viz.* that it is certain as any thing can be, that no ſuch altered goſpels were ever publiſhed; and that if the fact had been thus, it would have been mentioned with deteſtation by all the hiſtorians, and not be found only in one blind paſſage of a puny chronicle. Indeed there cannot be a plainer inſtance of the power of that prejudice and bigotry againſt Chriſtianity, which has poſſeſſed the minds of the gentlemen that glory in the name of *Free-thinkers*, than their laying hold on ſuch a ſtory as this to prove a general corruption of the goſpels, contrary to all reaſon and common ſenſe. Let us ſuppoſe the emperor Anaſtaſius to have had an intention to alter the copies of the goſpels (which yet it is highly improbable he ſhould attempt), he could only have got ſome of the copies into his hands: there would ſtill have been vaſt numbers of copies ſpread through different parts of the empire, which he could not lay hold of, eſpecially conſidering how much he was hated and oppoſed: or if we ſhould make the abſurd and impoſſible ſuppoſition of his being able to get all the copies throughout the eaſt into his hands; yet as there were ſtill innumerable copies in the weſt, where he had little or no power, they would have im-

* Diſcourſe of Free-thinking, p. 89, 90.

mediately

mediately detected the alteration and corruption, if there had been any. Loud complaints would have been made of the attempt; but no ſuch complaints were ever made: and in fact it is evident, that there have been no greater differences ſince that time between the eaſtern and weſtern copies than there were before. And it is undeniably manifeſt, from great numbers of authors, who lived in the preceding ages, and whoſe works are come down to us, that the ſcriptures, a great part of which is tranſcribed into their writings, were the ſame before that pretended alteration, that they have been ſince.

With a view of ſhewing the uncertainty of the ſacred text of the New Teſtament, this author takes notice of the various readings collected by Dr. Mills, which he ſays amount to thirty thouſand. This objection has been ſo fully expoſed, and this whole matter ſet in ſo clear a light by the famous Dr. Bentley, under the character of *Philoleutherus Lipſienſis*, that one ſhould think it would have been for ever ſilenced. And yet it has been frequently repeated ſince by the writers on that ſide, and particularly by Dr. Tindal, in his *Chriſtianity as old as the Creation*, without taking the leaſt notice of the clear and ſatisfactory anſwer that had been returned to it.

The ancient prophets have been the conſtant objects of the ſneers and reproaches of theſe gentlemen: and accordingly this writer has told us, that, *to obtain the prophetic ſpirit, they played upon muſic, and drank wine**. That they might very lawfully and properly drink wine, in a country where there was great plenty of it, may well be allowed, without any diminution of their character; and that they employed muſic, particularly in ſinging praiſes to God, may be concluded from ſeveral paſſages in the ſacred writings. But certainly, if they had the prophetic ſpirit at all, neither wine nor muſic gave it them, or could enable them to foretel things to come. But then he does them the honour to ſay, *they were great free-thinkers*, and that "they writ with "as great liberty againſt the eſtabliſhed religion of the Jews "(which the people looked on as the inſtitution of God himſelf), "as if they looked upon it all to be impoſture." That the prophets freely declared againſt the Jewiſh corruptions, againſt their

* Diſcourſe of Free-thinking, p. 153.

idolatries and immoralities, and againſt their laying the chief ſtreſs on ritual obſervances, whilſt they neglected the weightier matters of the law, is very true. And this is here, by an unpardonable diſingenuity, repreſented as an inveighing againſt the Moſaic diſpenſation, as if they did not believe it to have been originally of divine inſtitution: whereas it is to the laſt degree evident, that they all along ſuppoſe the law of Moſes to have been inſtituted by God himſelf, and reprove the people and prieſts, not for their adherence to that law, but for their deviations from it, and neglect of the moſt important duties there enjoined.

This gentleman has given us a long liſt of *free-thinkers;* but there is none of them all of whom he ſeems to ſpeak with greater complacency than Epicurus, though he owns that his ſyſtem was a *Syſtem of Atheiſm**. And after having obſerved, that Epicurus was eminent for that *moſt divine of all virtues, friendſhip*, he ſays, *that we Chriſtians ought to have a high veneration of him* on this account, *becauſe even our holy religion itſelf does not any where particularly require of us this virtue.* The noble author of the *Characteriſtics* had made the ſame obſervation before him: and both the one and the other cite a paſſage from biſhop Taylor, to ſhew that there is no word properly ſignifying *friendſhip* in the New Teſtament. Thus they have happily hit upon an inſtance in which the morality of the goſpel is defective, and exceeded by that of Epicurus. But it ought to be conſidered, that friendſhip, when underſtood of a particular affection between two or more perſons, is not always a virtue. It may in ſome caſes incroach upon a nobler and more extenſive benevolence, and may cauſe perſons, and hath often done ſo, to ſacrifice the moſt important duties to private affections. Or, where this is not the caſe, yet where friendſhip ariſeth from a particular conformity of natural tempers and inclinations between ſome men and others, or, as Lord Shafteſbury expreſſes it, that peculiar relation which is formed by a conſent and harmony of minds, it does not properly come under the preſcription of a law, nor can be the matter of a general precept. But if it be underſtood of that benevolence which uniteth virtuous minds in the ſacred bands of a ſpecial cordial affection, never was this more ſtrongly recom-

* Diſcourſe of Free-thinking, p. 90. 129.

mended

mended and enforced than in the gospel of Jesus. It requireth us to love and do good to all mankind, in which sense bishop Taylor rightly observes, in the very passage referred to, that *Christian charity is friendship to all the world.* And the last-mentioned noble writer asketh, *Can any friendship be so heroical as love to mankind*?* And, besides this general affection towards all men, the gospel requireth us to cultivate a still nearer, stronger, and more intimate affection towards good men, whom it representeth as obliged to *love one another with a pure heart fervently.* Lord Shaftesbury is pleased to mention St. Paul's saying, that *perhaps for a good man one would even dare to die*, and observes, that the *apostle is so far from founding any precept upon it, that he ushers it in with a very dubious peradventure*†. But it is to be supposed, his Lordship had not considered that noble passage of St. John, *Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he, our Lord Jesus Christ, laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren*, 1 John iii. 16. Can friendship be carried to a nobler height, or be enforced by more engaging motives, or a more powerful example? Can it be pretended, that the *most divine of all virtues, friendship*, is not *required* of us in our *holy religion*, when we are there required, if properly called to it, to give so glorious a proof of our friendship to our Christian brethren, whom we are taught to regard as united to us by the most sacred ties?

We shall dismiss this *Discourse of Free-thinking* with observing, that as the author of it hath put Solomon into his list of free-thinkers, for asserting, as he pretends he did, the mortality of the soul, and denying a future state, though the contrary is manifest from what Solomon himself saith, Eccles. xii. 7. 14. so he takes that occasion to inform his reader, that the immortality of the soul was *first taught by the Egyptians*, and was an *invention of theirs*‡. Mr Toland had said the same thing before in his letters to Serena§; and this may help us to judge how far some of our boasted free-thinkers are from being friends to natural religion taken in its just extent.

Soon after this *Discourse of Free-thinking* appeared, the re-

* Characteriſt. vol. ii. p. 229.
† Ibid. vol. i. p. 102.
‡ Diſcourſe of Free-thinking, p. 152.
§ Letter 2d.

verend Mr. Hoadley, now lord biſhop of Wincheſter, publiſhed ſome very ſenſible *Queries addreſſed to the Authors of a late "Diſcourſe of Free-thinking;"* in which the diſhoneſt inſinuations, falſe reaſonings, and pernicious tendency of that treatiſe are laid open in a ſhort and conciſe, but clear and convincing manner. There were ſeveral other ingenious pamphlets publiſhed to the ſam purpoſe: but none of them was ſo generally admired and applauded as the *Remarks on a late "Diſcourſe of Free-thinking," by Phileleutherus Lipſienſis, i. e.* Dr. Bentley. This learned writer hath ſo fully and effectually detected and expoſed the great and inexcuſable miſtakes committed by the author of that diſcourſe, his blunders and abſurdities, his frequent wrong tranſlations, and miſunderſtanding of the authors he quotes, or wilful perverſions and miſrepreſentations of their ſenſe, that it might, one ſhould think, have diſcouraged him from appearing any more as a writer in this cauſe*.

But ſuch was this gentleman's zeal againſt Chriſtianity, that, ſome years after, he thought fit to attack it in another way, which was more ſubtil and more dangerous. He publiſhed a *Diſcourſe on the Grounds and Reaſons of the Chriſtian Religion*, London, 1724, 8vo. as if his deſign had been to do real ſervice to Chriſtianity, by eſtabliſhing it upon a ſure and ſolid foundation. The ſcheme he lays down is this: that our Saviour and his apoſtles put the whole proof of Chriſtianity ſolely and entirely upon the prophecies of the Old Teſtament: that if theſe proofs are valid, Chriſ-

* There was a French tranſlation of the "Diſcourſe of Free-thinking," carried on under Mr. Collins's own eye, and printed at the Hague in 1714, though it bears London on the title page. In this tranſlation ſeveral material alterations are made, and a different turn is given to ſeveral paſſages from what was in Mr. Collins's original Engliſh. This is plainly done with a view to evade the charges which had been brought againſt him by Dr. Bentley, under the character of "Phileleutherus Lipſienſis," ſome of which charges that bore very properly againſt Mr. Collins's book, as it was firſt publiſhed, will appear impertinent to thoſe that judge only by this tranſlation. But care is taken not to give the leaſt notice of theſe alterations to the reader, upon whom it is made to paſs for a faithful verſion of the original. All this is clearly ſhewn by the author of the French tranſlation of "Dr. Bentley's Remarks on the Diſcourſe of Free-thinking," which was printed at Amſterdam in 1738, under the title of "Friponerie Laique des pretendus Eſprits forts d'Angleterre: The Lay-craft of the pretended Free-thinkers of England."

Chriſtianity is eſtabliſhed upon its true foundation; but if they are invalid, and the arguments brought from thence be not concluſive, and the prophecies cited from thence be not fulfilled, *Chriſtianity has no juſt foundation, and is therefore falſe.* Accordingly he ſets himſelf to ſhew, that the prophecies cited in the New Teſtament from the Old, in proof of Chriſtianity, four or five of which he particularly conſiders, are only typical and allegorical proofs; and that allegorical proofs are no proofs, according to *ſcholaſtic rules*, i. e. as he plainly intends it, according to the rules of ſound reaſon and common ſenſe. He aſſerts, that the expectation of the Meſſiah did not obtain among the Jews, till a little before the time of our Saviour's appearing, when they were under the oppreſſion of the Romans; and that the apoſtles put a new interpretation on the Jewiſh books, which was not agreeable to the obvious and literal meaning of thoſe books, and was contrary to the ſenſe of the Jewiſh nation: That Chriſtianity deriveth all its authority from the Old Teſtament, and is wholly revealed there, not literally, but myſtically and allegorically; and that therefore Chriſtianity is the allegorical ſenſe of the Old Teſtament, and is not improperly called *Myſtical Judaiſm;* and that conſequently the Old Teſtament is, properly ſpeaking, the *ſole true Canon of Chriſtians:* That the allegorical reaſoning is ſet up by St. Paul, and the other apoſtles, as the true and only reaſoning proper to bring all men to the faith of

land." This gentleman, Mr. de la Chapelle, has made it appear, that Mr. Collins, and his Tranſlator, who acted under his direction, have been guilty of palpable falſifications and frauds; which ill became one who had in that very book raiſed a loud outcry againſt the clergy for "corrupting and mangling of authors, and for pious frauds in the tranſlation or publiſhing of books." And I cannot but obſerve on this occaſion, what muſt have occurred to every one that has been much converſant in the deiſtical writers, that it would be hard to produce any perſons whatſoever who are chargeable with more unfair and fraudulent management in their quotations, in curtailing, adding to, or altering, the paſſages they cite, or taking them out of their connexion, and making them ſpeak directly contrary to the ſentiments of the authors. It is well known that they affect frequently to quote Chriſtian divines; but they ſeldom do it fairly, and often wilfully miſrepreſent and pervert their meaning. Many glaring inſtances of this ſort might be produced out of the writings of the moſt eminent deiſtical authors, if any man ſhould think it worth his while to make a collection to this purpoſe.

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Chriſt; and all other methods of reaſoning are wholly diſcarded. Thus it appeareth, that the evident deſign of this author's book is to ſhew, that the only foundation on which Chriſtianity is built is falſe: that the firſt publiſhers of the goſpel laid the whole ſupport and credit of Chriſt's divine miſſion, and of the religion he taught, upon pretended Jewiſh prophecies, applied in a ſenſe which had no foundation in the prophecies themſelves, and contrary to the plain original meaning and intention of thoſe prophecies; which the Jews had never underſtood nor applied in that ſenſe, and which had nothing to ſupport it but allegory; *i. e.* the mere fancy of him that ſo applies it. If we needed any farther proof of our author's intentions towards Chriſtianity, it might be obſerved, that he repreſents Jeſus and his apoſtles as having founded their religion on *prophecy*, in like manner as the ſeveral ſects among the heathens did theirs on *divination*. And theſe prophets, he tells us, manifeſted their divine inſpiration by the *diſcovery of loſt goods, and telling of fortunes**. So that he makes Jeſus and his apoſtles found their religion on the predictions of fortune-tellers and diviners, and thoſe miſapplied too; which plainly ſhews what a deſpicable idea this writer intended to convey of the Chriſtian religion, and the bleſſed author of it.

Few books have made a greater noiſe than this did at its firſt publication. The turn given to the controverſy had ſomething in it that ſeemed new, and was managed with great art; and yet, when cloſely examined, it appears to be weak and trifling. The very fundamental principle of the author's whole ſyſtem, viz. That the prophecies of the Old Teſtament are the ſole foundation of Chriſtianity, and the only proofs and evidences inſiſted upon by our Saviour and his apoſtles in confirmation of it, is abſolutely falſe; as any one may know that can read the New Teſtament: for it is undeniable, that our bleſſed Lord often appealeth to his wonderful works, as manifeſt proofs that the Father had ſent him; and the apoſtles in like manner frequently appealed to his miracles and reſurrection, and to the miracles wrought, and the extraordinary gifts of the Holy Ghoſt poured forth in his name, as unconteſted proofs of the divine authority of that ſcheme of religion which they publiſhed to the world.

* Diſcourſe on the Grounds, &c. of the Chriſtian Religion, chap. vi.

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With regard to the prophecies, the courſe of his reaſoning really amounts to this: that becauſe there are difficulties and obſcurities attending ſome very few paſſages cited out of the Old Teſtament in the New, as having a reference to the times of the goſpel; and we cannot well, at this diſtance, ſee the propriety of the application; therefore the whole of the New Teſtament is falſe; and the accounts given of our Saviour, his excellent diſcourſes, the miracles he performed, and the illuſtrious atteſtations given to him from heaven, are of no force at all; and all the arguments drawn from thence are ineffectual and vain. It is in the ſame ſtrain of reaſoning that he concludes, that becauſe four or five prophecies (for he produces no more) cited in the New Teſtament from the Old, ſeem not to relate to the goſpel times in a literal, but in a ſecondary and typical, *i. e.* as he explains it, an allegorical ſenſe, therefore none of the Old Teſtament prophecies can be applied directly and literally at all, or have any relation to our Saviour and the goſpel diſpenſation. And becauſe the modern Jews conteſt the application of ſome prophecies to the Meſſiah, which are applied to our Saviour in the New Teſtament, therefore the ancient Jews allowed none of thoſe prophecies to be applied to the Meſſiah, which in the New Teſtament are applied to him: and yet the contrary is invincibly evident from their writings ſtill extant, by which it appeareth, that moſt of the prophecies applied to our Saviour in the New Teſtament, and many others not there mentioned, were underſtood of the Meſſiah by the ancient Jews, as many of them ſtill are by the moſt celebrated of the modern Jews themſelves. And it was certainly a ſtrange attempt in this author, to endeavour to prove, that the Jews had no notion or expectation of the Meſſiah, till a little before the times of our Saviour, when all their writers, with one conſent, ancient and modern, who are the proper judges in ſuch a caſe, agree, that there had been all along among them an hope and expectation of the Meſſiah, founded, as they univerſally believed, on the ſacred writings. It may further let us ſee this writer's ingenuity, that becauſe St. Paul makes uſe of an allegory in his epiſtle to the Galatians, though he there manifeſtly introduces it by way of illuſtration, and expreſsly declares to thoſe to whom he writes, that theſe things are *allegorized*, therefore he layeth the whole ſtreſs of his arguments upon allegory as

the principal and only proof; and that he and the other apoſtles abſolutely reject all other reaſoning but the allegorical, which is no reaſoning at all. And yet any one that ever read St. Paul's epiſtles muſt know, that he often makes uſe of reaſoning and argument, and very cloſe reaſoning too. The laſt inſtance I ſhall produce of this author's extraordinary way of arguing is, that becauſe the apoſtles and ſacred writers of the New Teſtament acknowledge the authority of the Old, and draw proofs from thence, therefore the New Teſtament is of no authority at all, and the Old Teſtament is the ſole Canon of Chriſtians, *i. e.* becauſe there is an harmony between the Old Teſtament and New, and becauſe the former had foretold a glorious perſon who was to introduce a new and more perfect diſpenſation; therefore that new and more perfect diſpenſation is no new diſpenſation at all, but is abſolutely and in all reſpects the ſame with that old and more imperfect one in which it was prefigured and foretold, and which was deſigned to prepare the way for it.

Having made theſe general obſervations, it will be proper to take notice of ſome of the anſwers that were made to this book; and here that which was written by Dr. Chandler, the lord biſhop of Coventry and Litchfield, deſerves ſpecial notice. It was publiſhed in 1725, and is intitled *A Defence of Chriſtianity, from the Prophecies of the Old Teſtament.* This is a very learned and elaborate performance, and executed with great judgment. In it the biſhop firſt ſets himſelf to ſhew, that there was a general expectation of the Meſſiah at the time when our Saviour appeared; and he traces this expectation from that time to the very age of the prophets themſelves. He then proceeds to ſhew, that to ſupport this expectation there were expreſs literal prophecies, that truly concern the Meſſiah, of which he produces twelve, which he particularly conſiders; and he proves with great evidence, that they were applied by the ancient Jews to the Meſſiah, and that it appeareth from the prophecies themſelves, that they could not be applied to any other. He then goes on to ſhew, that, beſides theſe, there were typical prophecies to the ſame effect, and which were intended to be applied to the Meſſiah. The author of the *Grounds*, &c. had every where repreſented typical prophecies, as ſignifying no more than that they were afterwards applied in an allegorical ſenſe, and had aſſerted that

that there appear not the leaſt traces of a typical intention in the writers of the Old Teſtament, or any other Jews of thoſe times. In oppoſition to which, the biſhop plainly proves, from the writings of the prophets themſelves, that they were wont to propheſy by types, and to ſpeak of themſelves or others as types of other perſons and people, on purpoſe to foretel what ſhould be done by or to ſingle perſons or nations hereafter; of which he gives ſeveral inſtances: That therefore typical actions and typical diſcourſes made part of the prophetic language, and were underſtood by the people to carry a reference to ſomething future. And conſequently, if the prophets ſpeak of the Meſſiah in their own perſons, or of other perſons as types of him, there is nothing in this but what is agreeable to the known prophetic language. He makes it appear, that the prophets themſelves underſtood ſome of thoſe prophecies as typical of the Meſſiah, and, at the time of delivering thoſe prophecies, gave intimations that they were thus to be referred: That accordingly the Jews acknowledge, that there were types in the Old Teſtament, and particularly that there were types of the Meſſiah; and that both the ancient and modern Jews underſtand many texts of the Meſſiah as the Chriſtians do, which are plainly typical; and he ſhews, that there were good reaſons for covering ſome of the events relating to the Meſſiah under the veil of types, which were not to be fully explained till the age in which they were fulfilled.

He next proceeds to give a diſtinct account of the texts pretended by the author of the *Grounds* to be miſapplied. He juſtly obſerves, that if the principal characters of the Meſſiah be evidently found in the Jewiſh ſcriptures, to the ſame intent for which they are cited by Chriſt and his apoſtles, it is unreaſonable to quit a certain truth, becauſe every individual circumſtance is not equally clear; and it doth not plainly appear at this time how two or three authorities are to be applied to the Meſſiah. And that the expreſſion *that it might be fulfilled*, on which the author layeth ſo great a ſtreſs, was ſometimes deſigned by the Jews to mean no more than that ſomething anſwered alike in both caſes, or that there was a ſuitableneſs in the cauſe or circumſtance of one event to the other: and he ſhews, that the ſame way of ſpeaking continueth among the Jews to this day.

With regard to the allegorical way, he obſerves, that it was chiefly

chiefly in condeſcenſion to the Jewiſh Chriſtians that St. Paul at all uſed it; but that nothing can be more falſe and diſingenuous, than to pretend that he never uſed any other way of reaſoning than this. Finally, he thinks it may be allowed, that, conſidering the illuſtrious atteſtations given to our Saviour, which plainly ſhewed that he was a teacher ſent from God, his interpretation of the prophecies ought to be acquieſced in; ſince he wrought his miracles by the ſame ſpirit by which thoſe prophecies were delivered; and he inſtances in ſeveral prophecies, the interpretation of which given by our Lord, though different from that of the Jews, was actually fulfilled and verified by the event.

There was another learned author of the ſame name with the biſhop, Mr. (now Dr.) Samuel Chandler, who alſo diſtinguiſhed himſelf on this occaſion, in a book intitled, *A Vindication of the Chriſtian Religion*, publiſhed in 1725, 8vo. In the former part of that work, he hath a diſcourſe on the nature and uſe of miracles; in which, after having ſtated the true notion of a miracle, and given the characters that diſtinguiſh true miracles from falſe, he clearly vindicates the miracles of our Saviour, and ſhews, that as they were circumſtanced, they were convincing proofs of his divine miſſion. The ſecond part of the ſame book is particularly deſigned as an anſwer to the author of the *Grounds and Reaſons of the Chriſtian Religion*. After having ſhewn, that the prophecies of the Old Teſtament are not the only proofs of Chriſtianity, and that it is very abſurd to pretend, as that author had done, that the Old Teſtament is the ſole canon of Chriſtians, he clearly evinceth, that many of thoſe prophecies had a farther reference than to the times when they were firſt delivered; and particularly, that they contain a deſcription of a great and good perſon, to proceed from David, who, notwithſtanding his ſufferings, ſhould be highly exalted, and under whom true religion and righteouſneſs ſhould be more extenſive than before; that theſe prophecies relate principally to a ſpiritual ſalvation and deliverance; and that the Jews in our Saviour's time, as appeareth from their moſt ancient writings, applied many of thoſe prophecies to the Meſſiah. He next treats of the double ſenſe of prophecies, which the author of the *Grounds* had ridiculed, and ſhews that there is no abſurdity in ſuppoſing, that as ſome prophecies relate wholly to the Meſſiah, ſo others may relate partly to his time, and

and partly to the times when they were firſt delivered: and that this double ſenſe of the prophecies was originally intended, and was ſo underſtood by the Jews. He accounts for the particular places excepted againſt by the author of the *Grounds*, and obſerves, as the biſhop had done, that the apoſtles ſometimes quote paſſages from the Old Teſtament, not in a way of direct proof, but to illuſtrate the argument they are upon; and ſometimes by way of accommodation, to ſignify a correſpondence of events, and to deſcribe things that happened in their own times, by expreſſions derived from the ancient prophetic writings. That as arguments *ad hominem* have been always allowed, ſo if there were ſome particular paſſages in the ancient prophets, which were applied by the Jews to the Meſſiah, the reference of which was not ſo natural and clear, the apoſtles were fully juſtifiable in applying them to Jeſus Chriſt, in their reaſonings with the Jews, as far as they did agree with his perſon and character; but that there are few inſtances of this kind; nor did the apoſtles make uſe of this way of argument, except to the Jews or Jewiſh proſelytes; and even to them they did not put the chief ſtreſs on theſe things, but laid before them other ſolid and ſubſtantial proofs of Chriſtianity. Finally, if the difficulties which attend the quotations out of the Old Teſtament were much greater than they really are, yet this would not affect the credit or truth of the Chriſtian religion, which hath many ſo evidences to ſupport it.

There were ſeveral other good anſwers publiſhed to the *Grounds*, &c. and which were ſo well executed, as to deſerve that a particular account ſhould be given of them, if my preſcribed limits would allow. Among others, Dr. Bullock's ſermons were very juſtly and highly eſteemed, in which "the reaſoning of Chriſt and his apoſtles in their defence of Chriſtianity "is conſidered. To which is prefixed, a preface, taking notice "of the falſe repreſentations of Chriſtianity, and of the apoſtles' "reaſoning in defence of it, in a book intitled *A Diſcourſe of the "Grounds and Reaſons of the Chriſtian Religion*," London, 8vo. 1725. Dr. Sykes alſo publiſhed an *Eſſay upon the Truth of the Chriſtian Religion, wherein its real Foundation in the Old Teſtament is ſhewn, occaſioned by the "Diſcourſe of the Grounds*," London, 8vo. 1725. In this book it is both clearly proved, that there are ſome direct prophecies relating to the Meſſiah in the

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Old Teſtament, eſpecially in the book of Daniel; and there are many good obſervations to ſhew, that the New Teſtament writers often quote paſſages by way of accommodation and alluſion only; and that moſt of the texts produced as prophecies by the author of the *Grounds* are of this kind. To theſe may be added, an ingenious treatiſe, intitled, *The true Grounds and Reaſons of the Chriſtian Religion, in Oppoſition to the falſe ones ſet forth in a late Book, intitled* "*The Grounds, &c.*" London, 8vo, 1725. *Letters to the Author of the* "*Diſcourſe of the Grounds,*" *ſhewing, that Chriſtianity is ſupported by Facts well atteſted; that the Words of Iſaiah, Chap.* vii. 14. *in their literal Senſe are a Prophecy of the Birth and Conception of the Meſſias; and that the Goſpel-Application of ſeveral other Paſſages in the Old Teſtament is juſt*, by John Greene, 8vo, London, 1726. Mr. Whiſton alſo publiſhed, *The literal Accompliſhment of Scripture-Prophecies, being a full Anſwer to a late* "*Diſcourſe of the Grounds, &c.*" London, 8vo, 1724: and he afterwards publiſhed *A Supplement to the literal Accompliſhment of the Scripture-Prophecies*, London, 8vo. 1725. It may be proper alſo to mention a book, which was occaſioned by the *Grounds*, &c. though not directly in anſwer to it, intitled, *The Uſe and Intent of Prophecy in the ſeveral Ages of the Church*, by Dr. Thomas Sherlock, biſhop of London. This is an excellent performance, in which a regular ſeries of prophecy is deduced through the ſeveral ages from the beginning, and its great uſefulneſs ſhewn. The various degrees of light are diſtinctly marked out, which were ſucceſſively communicated in ſuch a manner as to anſwer the great ends of religion, and the deſigns of Providence, till thoſe great events to which they were intended to be ſubſervient ſhould receive their accompliſhment. There was another valuable book, which, though not publiſhed till ſome years after, may be conſidered as peculiarly deſigned againſt the *Grounds*, &c. *viz. The Argument from Prophecy, in Proof that Jeſus is the Meſſiah, vindicated, in ſome Conſiderations on the Prophecies of the Old Teſtament, as the Grounds and Reaſons of the Chriſtian Religion*, by Moſes Lowman, London, 8vo, 1733. The laſt book I ſhall here take notice of, as publiſhed on this occaſion, was *A Review of the Controverſy between the Author of the* "*Diſcourſe of the Grounds and Reaſons of the Chriſtian Religion*" *and his Adverſaries*,

faries, in a Letter to the Author, 8vo, 1726, by Mr. Thomas Jeffrey. This is drawn up in a clear and judicious manner, and was deſervedly well eſteemed.

The author of the *Grounds*, &c. thought fit, in 1727, to publiſh a ſecond book, which was to paſs for a defence of his firſt, in anſwer to his ſeveral adverſaries, and particularly to the biſhop of *Litchfield*. It was intitled, *The Scheme of Literal Prophecy conſidered*. In this book he very ſlightly paſſeth over the chief things he ought to have proved, and on which in his former book he had laid the greateſt ſtreſs. Inſtead of confirming what he had ſo poſitively aſſerted before, that the prophecies of the Old Teſtament were the only proof on which Chriſtianity is founded, he only ſhews that they are part of the proof inſiſted on by our Saviour and his apoſtles, and moſt diſingenuouſly ſuppoſes, that his adverſaries would not allow them to be any proofs at all. He had affirmed with great confidence, that none of the ancient Jews ever underſtood any of thoſe prophecies of the Meſſiah, which are applied to Chriſt in the New Teſtament: but the utmoſt that he now attempts to ſhew is, that ſome of thoſe prophecies were not underſtood by the ancient Jews of the Meſſiah; and even for this he can give no other reaſon than that ſome of the modern Jews do not ſo apply them. He has nothing now to prove, that the Old Teſtament is the only canon of Chriſtians, or that the allegorical ſenſe is the only ſenſe of prophecies intended by our Saviour and his apoſtles. And whereas his anſwerers had urged, that though moſt of the prophecies applied in the New Teſtament to our Lord Jeſus Chriſt were literally fulfilled in him, yet ſome particular paſſages might be uſed only in a way of illuſtration and accommodation, and not as direct proofs; he ſets himſelf, as his manner is, with a mighty pomp of quotations, to ſhew the abſurdity of ſuppoſing, that the apoſtles' method of citing prophecies was nothing but a mere accommodation of phraſes, as if his adverſaries had held, that all the paſſages cited in the New Teſtament from the Old were applied only by way of accommodation, which not one of them ever aſſerted. He puts on an appearance of anſwering what the biſhop had alledged concerning the general and conſtant tradition, which had obtained among the Jews with regard to the Meſſiah; and he conſiders the twelve prophecies that learned writer had produced

duced, as literally fulfilled in the Meſſiah. But any one that will take the pains to compare what he hath here offered with the book he pretends to anſwer, will find how little he has been able to ſay, that is really to the purpoſe, and how far he has been from invalidating the proofs which had been brought. He often ſlips over the moſt material things that had been urged, and, as the biſhop afterwards complained, takes no more notice of them than if he had not read them. If he can but find a ſingle paſſage in any Jewiſh or Chriſtian writer, though but a modern one, and contrary to the general conſent of interpreters, this is laid hold on to ſet aſide the biſhop's interpretation, and to ſhew that the Jews did not generally underſtand a prophecy of the Meſſiah, or apply it to him, though clear evidence had been produced that they ſo applied it.

But there is no part of the *Literal Scheme, &c.* which the author has ſo much laboured, as that where he hath collected together all that he could meet with againſt the antiquity and authority of the book of Daniel, and the prophecies contained there. This occaſioned a ſecond anſwer from the learned biſhop, intitled, *A Vindication of the Defence of Chriſtianity from the Prophecies of the Old Teſtament*, publiſhed in 1728, in which he hath largely and very ſolidly vindicated the antiquity and authority of the book of Daniel, and the application of the prophecies there contained to the Meſſiah, againſt the author's objections: and hath alſo fully obviated whatſoever he had farther advanced againſt the antiquity and univerſality of the tradition and expectation among the Jews concerning the Meſſiah. The learned Dr. Rogers had before this publiſhed his very valuable ſermons, on the *Neceſſity of divine Revelation, and the Truth of the Chriſtian Religion.* "To "which is prefixed a preface, with ſome remarks on a late book, "intitled, *The Scheme of Literal Prophecy conſidered*," London, 1727, 8vo. Soon after which, there came out an ingenious pamphlet, intitled, *The true Grounds of the Expectation of the Meſſiah*, in two letters by *Philalethes*, London, 1727, ſaid to be written by Dr. Sykes. Dr. Bullock alſo appeared again to great advantage in this controverſy, in a treatiſe intitled, *The Reaſoning of Chriſt and his Apoſtles vindicated*, in two parts. 1. *A Defence of the Argument from Miracles, proving the Argument from Prophecy not neceſſary to a rational Defence of our Religion.*

gion. 2. *A Defence of the Argument from Prophecy, proving the Chriſtian Scheme to have a rational Foundation upon the Prophecies of the Old Teſtament,* in anſwer to a book intitled *The Scheme of Literal Prophecy conſidered,* London, 1728, 8vo. In this book, Dr. Bullock finds great fault with our author's way of managing the argument: he obſerves, that he has not only "raked together the unguarded expreſſions of ingenious men, "but by altering, adding to, and curtailing paſſages referred to, "and by other diſingenuous methods unbecoming a man of hon-"our and ſincerity, wreſteth them to purpoſes apparently contrary "to their true import." And yet no man had raiſed a louder outcry againſt the clergy, for abuſing, corrupting, and mangling of authors to ſerve their own purpoſes, than this gentleman had done in his *Diſcourſe of Free-thinking.* The biſhop, in his *Vindication,* makes the ſame complaint againſt him; ſo does Dr. Samuel Chandler, who publiſhed, on this occaſion, a judicious *Vindication of the Antiquity and Authority of Daniel's Prophecies, and their Application to Jeſus Chriſt:* in anſwer to the objections of the author of the *Scheme of Literal Prophecy conſidered,* London, 1728, 8vo. About the ſame time was publiſhed, *Chriſtianity the Perfection of all Religion, natural and revealed; wherein ſome of the principal Prophecies relating to the Meſſiah in the Old Teſtament are ſhewn to belong to him in the literal Senſe, in Oppoſition to the Attempts of the Literal Scheme,* &c. by Thomas Jeffreys, London, 1728. I ſhall conclude this letter with obſerving, that this attack againſt Chriſtianity, though carried on with great art as well as malice, produced this advantage, that it gave occaſion to a full and accurate examination into the nature, deſign, and extent of many of the Old Teſtament prophecies, and to the placing ſome difficult paſſages in a clearer light.

LETTER VIII.

Mr. Woolſton's Diſcourſes on the Miracles of our Saviour—Under pretence of ſtanding up for the allegorical Senſe of Scripture, he endeavours abſolutely to deſtroy the Truth of the Facts recorded in the Goſpels—His diſingenuous Repreſentation of the Senſe of the Fathers on this Head, and his falſe Quotations—He charges the Accounts given of Chriſt's Miracles as abſurd, falſe, and incredible—His groſs and profane Buffoonry, and baſe Reflections on the Character of our Saviour; and yet he pretends a Zeal for his Honour and Meſſiahſhip—A Specimen of his way of Reaſoning with regard to ſeveral of Chriſt's Miracles, and his Reſurrection—Many good Anſwers publiſhed againſt him.

SIR,

I HAVE already taken notice of ſeveral attempts, which were manifeſtly intended to ſubvert the truth and divine authority of our holy religion. The laſt that was mentioned was, that of the author of the *Diſcourſe of the Grounds and Reaſons of the Chriſtian Religion*, who, under pretence of ſetting Chriſtianity on a ſure and ſolid foundation, had endeavoured to ſhew that it hath no foundation at all; that it is founded wholly on the Old Teſtament prophecies, taken not in a literal, but merely in an allegorical, *i. e.* as he plainly deſigned it, in a falſe ſenſe, contrary to the original intention of the prophecies themſelves. In oppoſition to him it was clearly ſhewn, that many of the Old Teſtament prophecies are juſtly applied to our Saviour in their proper and literal ſenſe. Beſides which it was urged, that there were other ſolid proofs of Chriſtianity, particularly that of our Saviour's miracles, and his reſurrection from the dead; and the illuſtrious atteſtations given to him from heaven were evident proofs of his divine miſſion. And now, under pretence of acting the part of a moderator in this controverſy, a new antagoniſt aroſe, Mr. Woolſton, who endeavoured to allegorize away the miracles of our Saviour, as Mr. Collins had done the prophecies. This he firſt attempted in a pamphlet, intitled, *A Moderator between an Infidel*

Infidel and an Apoſtate; and in two *Supplements* to it: and afterwards more largely in ſix Diſcourſes on the miracles of our Saviour, which were ſucceſſively publiſhed at different times, in the years 1727, 1728, and 1729: the deſign of all which is to ſhew, that the accounts of the great facts recorded in the goſpels are to be underſtood wholly in a myſtical and allegorical ſenſe; and that, taken in the literal and hiſtorical ſenſe, they are falſe, abſurd, and fictitious. This attempt he hath carried on with greater rudeneſs and inſolence than any of thoſe that appeared before him. The Earl of Shafteſbury, even where he unhappily ſets up ridicule as the teſt and criterion of truth, expreſſeth his diſapprobation of *ſcurrilous buffoonry, groſs raillery,* and *an illiberal kind of wit.* And if there ever was any performance to which theſe characters might be juſtly applied, it is this of Mr. Woolſton. The ſame noble writer obſerves, that to *manage a debate ſo as to offend the public ear, is to be wanting in that reſpect that is due to the ſociety —— and that what is contrary to good breeding is, in this reſpect, as contrary to liberty.* If we are to judge of Mr. Woolſton's writings by this rule, they are as inconſiſtent with a juſt liberty, as they certainly are with good breeding and decency.

There are two ways by which he endeavours to anſwer the deſign he hath in view. The one is, by ſhewing that the literal ſenſe of our Saviour's miracles is denied by the moſt ancient and venerable writers of the Chriſtian church: the other is, by ſhewing the abſurdity of the accounts given in the goſpels, taken in the literal ſenſe. With regard to the firſt of theſe, he hath with great pomp produced many teſtimonies of the fathers, for whom he profeſſeth the profoundeſt veneration; and, by a ſtrange diſingenuity, endeavoureth to repreſent them as abſolutely denying the facts themſelves related in the goſpel; becauſe, according to a cuſtom which then obtained, they added to the literal, a ſpiritual and allegorical ſenſe, and took occaſion from thence to make pious alluſions. He pretendeth, that if we will adhere to the fathers, *the goſpel is in no ſort a literal ſtory;* and that *the hiſtory of Jeſus's life is only an emblematical repreſentation of his ſpiritual life in the ſouls of men.* But it is certain, and was evidently proved by his learned anſwerers, that in giving the allegorical and myſtical ſenſe, the fathers firſt ſuppoſed the literal

ſenſe, and the hiſtorical truth of the facts, and upon them built their allegorical interpretations. It is acknowledged, that in theſe they often exceeded juſt bounds, and too much indulged the vagaries of a pious fancy: but to pretend, that they intended to deny that the facts recorded by the evangeliſts were really done, is one of the moſt confident impoſitions that were ever put upon mankind; and it is not to be doubted, but the author himſelf was ſenſible of this. Many glaring inſtances of unfairneſs and diſingenuity in his quotations from the fathers were plainly proved upon him. It was ſhewn, that he hath quoted books generally allowed to be ſpurious, as the genuine works of the fathers; and hath, by falſe tranſlations and injurious interpolations, and foiſting in of words, done all that was in his power to pervert the true ſenſe of the authors he quotes; and that ſometimes he interprets them in a manner directly contrary to their own declared ſenſe, in the very paſſages he appeals to, as would have appeared, if he had fairly produced the whole paſſage.

It is not to be wondered at, that an author who was capable of ſuch a conduct ſhould ſtick at no methods to expoſe and miſrepreſent the accounts given by the evangeliſts of our Saviour's miracles. Under pretence of ſhewing the abſurdity of the literal and hiſtorical ſenſe of the facts recorded in the goſpels, he hath given himſelf an unreſtrained licence in invective and abuſe. The books of the evangeliſts, and the facts there related, he hath treated in a ſtrain of low and coarſe buffoonry, and with an inſolence and ſcurrility that is hardly to be paralleled. He aſſerts, that they are full of *improbabilities*, *incredibilities*, and *groſs abſurdities:* that they are like *Gulliverian tales of perſons and things, that out of the romance never had a being: that neither the fathers, nor the apoſtles, nor Jeſus himſelf, meant that his miracles ſhould be taken in the literal, but in the myſtical and parabolical ſenſe.* And he expreſsly declares, that *if Jeſus's miracles, literally taken, will not abide the teſt of ſenſe and reaſon, they muſt be rejected, and Jeſus's authority along with them**. He caſteth ſeveral reflections on our bleſſed Lord, ſo baſe and ſcurrilous, that they cannot but be extremely offenſive to a Chriſtian ear; and which even ſober heathens, many of whom regarded

* Diſcourſe IV. p. 16.

him

him as a perſon of great wiſdom and virtue, would have been aſhamed of; and yet this author charges the biſhop of London with *ignorance* or *malice*, in repreſenting him as a *writer in favour of infidelity*. He declares, that he is the *fartheſt of any man from being engaged in the cauſe of infidels or deiſts:* and that he *writes not for the ſervice of infidelity, which has no place in his heart, but for the honour of the holy Jeſus, and in defence of Chriſtianity.* The like declarations he frequently repeateth. He ends his fourth diſcourſe on our Saviour's miracles with avowing, that his deſign in theſe his diſcourſes is *the advancement of the truth and of the Meſſiahſhip of the holy Jeſus, to whom be glory for ever, Amen.* He concludes his ſixth diſcourſe in the ſame manner; and expreſſes himſelf in his firſt and ſecond Defence to the like purpoſe. Any one that compares theſe declarations with the whole ſtrain of his diſcourſes, will be apt to entertain the worſt opinion imaginable of the writer's ſincerity; and the moſt extenſive charity will ſcarce be able to acquit him from the moſt groſs and ſhocking prevarication.

But not to inſiſt farther on this, one would have expected, that, after all the clamours he hath raiſed againſt the evangelical accounts of our Saviour's miracles, he ſhould have had ſome formidable objections to produce; and yet, when ſtripped of the ridiculous turn he hath given them, they are, except ſome few difficulties, which are far from being new, and have been ſolidly anſwered, contemptibly vain and trifling. It is an objection he frequently repeats againſt what we are told concerning our Saviour's curing the diſeaſed, the blind, the lame, &c. that the evangeliſts have not given us an exact account of the nature and ſymptoms of their diſtempers, as phyſicians and ſurgeons would have done, that we might know whether the cure was ſupernatural. And if they had done this, it would, no doubt, have been improved as a ſtrong preſumption of art and contrivance in the relaters, and as no way conſiſtent with that honeſt, artleſs ſimplicity of narration, for which the evangeliſts are ſo remarkable. With regard to the cure of the man that was born blind, he finds fault that our Saviour did not cure him with a word ſpeaking, which he ſays would have been a great and real miracle; and if he had done ſo, as he did in ſeveral other caſes, this writer would have been as far from believing it as before. He will

have it, that, under pretence of anointing the blind man's eyes with clay and ſpittle, Jeſus made uſe of a ſovereign balſam which wrought the cure; and ſuppoſes, in direct contradiction to the whole ſtory, that his blindneſs was only a ſlight diſorder of the eyes, which was wearing away with age, and that therefore the reſtoring him to his ſight was no miracle at all, though the man himſelf, his parents, and friends that had known him all along, and the chief prieſts and phariſees, who made a ſtrict inquiry into the caſe, could not help acknowledging that it was a very great one. Our Saviour's diſcovering to the Samaritan woman the ſecrets of her paſt life, which convinced her of his being a prophet, and from whence he took occaſion to give her the moſt excellent inſtructions concerning the nature of true religion, paſſes with this writer for the trick of a *fortune-teller*. And whereas it appeareth from the account given by the evangeliſt, that the Samaritans looked for the Meſſiah under the idea of a divine teacher, and the *Saviour of the world*, he repreſents it as if they expected the Meſſiah, not as a *prince* or a *prophet*, but a *conjurer* only. Several other inſtances might be produced, in which he addeth or varieth circumſtances, and altereth the ſtory as recorded by the evangeliſts, that he may take occaſion to place it in a ridiculous light.

It is a remarkable conceſſion which is made by him in the beginning of his fifth Diſcourſe, that "it will be granted on all "hands, that the reſtoring a perſon indiſputably dead to life is a "ſtupendous miracle; and that two or three ſuch miracles, well-"atteſted and credibly reported, are enough to conciliate the be-"lief, that the author of them was a divine agent, and veſted "with the power of God*." Three miracles of this kind are recorded in the goſpel to have been wrought by Jeſus; *viz.* his raiſing Jairus's daughter, the widow's ſon at Naim, and Lazarus. And what has our author to object againſt theſe accounts? He objects in general againſt them all, that the perſons raiſed ought to have been magiſtrates or perſons of eminence. But the raiſing ſuch perſons would not have been ſo agreeable to the reſt of our Saviour's conduct and character, who ſhunned what might have the appearance of oſtentation, or be looked upon as an attempt to make an intereſt with the great. He farther objects, that the

* Diſcourſe V. p. 3.

perſons

perſons that were raiſed ſhould have told what they had ſeen and done in the ſeparate ſtate. And if the evangeliſts had been romantic writers that wanted to amuſe their readers with ſtrange ſtories, they might probably have inſerted ſome things of this kind into their accounts: but they confined themſelves to the plain facts, as far as they knew them, which they have related with the greateſt ſimplicity. He objects particularly againſt the ſtory of raiſing Jairus's daughter, becauſe ſhe was but *a girl of twelve years old;* as if the raiſing one of that age was not as great a miracle as if ſhe had been twenty. He next pretends that ſhe was only *in a fit;* though all the perſons about her, and her neareſt relations, were ſatisfied that ſhe was dead, and were making the uſual preparations for her funeral. It is enough with him, to diſcredit the ſtory of raiſing the widow's ſon at Naim from the dead, that he was not a perſon of importance, but a youth, and the ſon of a poor woman: and he has with great ſagacity diſcovered, that Jeſus's accidental meeting the corpſe, and touching the bier, is a plain proof that it was all a contrivance between him and the young man. To mention ſuch objections is to confute them. But perhaps he hath ſtronger ones to produce againſt the ſtory of the reſurrection of Lazarus, which he pronounceth to be ſuch *a contexture of folly and fraud, as is not to be equalled in all romantic hiſtory:* and yet the principal objection he hath to offer is no more than this, that three of the evangeliſts have not mentioned it. But no argument can be drawn againſt the truth of the fact from their ſilence; ſince it is evident that they never deſigned or pretended to record all the remarkable miracles which our Saviour wrought; and St. John, who was an eye-witneſs, and who chiefly taketh notice of the things which the others had omitted, hath given us a very diſtinct and particular account of it. Among the circumſtances which Mr. Woolſton looks upon to be ſufficient to ſet aſide that ſtory, one is, that we are told, *Jeſus wept.* This was a ſign of his great humanity, and the goodneſs of his temper; but our author thinks *a ſtoical apathy* would have become him better. Another is, that Jeſus called to Lazarus with *a loud voice* to *come forth;* which was certainly very proper, that all who were preſent might attend and obſerve. And what is very odd, he makes Lazarus's being *bound in grave cloaths*, and having his *head bound about with a napkin*, to be a very ſuſpicious

ſign that he had not been really dead; and very wiſely has found out, that Lazarus by a concert with Jeſus, who was at a conſiderable diſtance when it happened, contrived to be buried, and lie in the grave four days, that Jeſus might have the honour of ſeeming to raiſe him up from the dead. And becauſe the Jews took counſel to kill Jeſus, and he withdrew for a while from their rage, this is produced as a proof, that the Jews knew he was guilty of a fraud, and that he himſelf was conſcious of it; whereas it appears from the whole account, that their taking counſel to put him to death was owing to their being ſenſible of the greatneſs of the miracle, and that it was too evident to be denied, and was likely to draw the people after him.

The objections which he makes in the perſon of a Jewiſh rabbi, againſt the evangelical ſtory of our Lord's reſurrection, which he declareth to be a *complication of abſurdities, incoherences, and contradictions*, are equally frivolous. He inſinuates, that the guards ſet by the Roman governor, at the deſire of the chief prieſts, to watch the body of Jeſus, ſuffered themſelves to be bribed or intoxicated by the diſciples; in which he is more quick-ſighted than the chief prieſts and phariſees, whom it more nearly concerned, who, it is plain, ſuſpected no ſuch thing; in which caſe, inſtead of excuſing, they would have endeavoured to get them ſeverely puniſhed. But what he ſeems to lay the principal ſtreſs upon is, a ſuppoſed covenant between the chief prieſts and Jeſus's diſciples, that the ſeal with which the ſtone of the door of the ſepulchre was ſealed ſhould not be broken, till the three days were entirely paſt: and that therefore the rolling away the ſtone from the ſepulchre, and breaking the ſeal before the three days were ended, was a breach of that covenant, and a proof of an impoſture. A moſt extraordinary conceit this! as if the rulers of the Jews would have troubled themſelves to enter into a concert with Jeſus's diſciples, whom they hated and deſpiſed, and who at that time had hid themſelves for fear of them, and were fled; or as if ſuch a covenant could bind our Lord from riſing when he judged fitteſt. As to that part of the objection which ſuppoſes, that he ought to have lain in the grave, according to his own prediction, three whole days and nights, it proceeds from a real or affected ignorance of the Jewiſh phraſeology. This is a modern objection. The ancient enemies of Chriſtianity did

not

not pretend that Jeſus roſe before the time prefixed: for they very well knew that, according to a way of ſpeaking uſual among the Jews and other nations, his riſing again on any part of the third day was ſufficient to anſwer the prediction. This matter was ſet in a clear light in *The Trial of the Witneſſes*: yet the objection was again repeated by the author of the *Reſurrection of Jeſus conſidered;* and was ſo fully expoſed by the learned anſwerers, that one would hope we ſhall hear no more of it*.

Mr. Woolſton makes it alſo a great objection againſt the truth of Jeſus's reſurrection, that he did not ſhew himſelf after his death to the chief-prieſts and rulers of the Jews. And indeed there is no objection with which the deiſtical writers have made a greater noiſe than this. It is urged particularly by the author of the *Reſurrection of Jeſus conſidered;* but, above all, Mr. Chubb has inſiſted upon it at large, and with great confidence, in his poſthumous works, vol. i. p. 337, *&c ſeq.* And yet good reaſons may be aſſigned, why it was not proper that it ſhould be ſo. Conſidering the cruel and inveterate malice they had ſhewn againſt Jeſus, and the power of their prejudices, there is no likelihood of their ſubmitting to the evidence. They had attributed his miracles to the power of the devil; and his raiſing Lazarus from the dead, of which they had full information, only put them upon attempting to deſtroy him. Inſtead of being wrought upon by the teſtimony of the ſoldiers, they endeavoured to ſtifle it. And if Jeſus had ſhewn himſelf to them after his paſſion, and they had pretended it was a ſpectre, or a deluſion, and had ſtill refuſed to acknowledge him after this, it would have been inſiſted upon as a ſtrong preſumption againſt the reality of his reſurrection. But let us ſuppoſe that Jeſus had not only appeared to them after his reſurrection, but that they themſelves had acknowledged the truth of his reſurrection and aſcenſion, and had owned him for their Meſſiah, and brought the body of the Jewiſh nation into it; can it be imagined that they who now make that objection would have been ſatisfied? It may rather be ſuppoſed, that thoſe great men's coming into it would have been repreſented as a proof that all was artifice and impoſture; and that the

* See the Evidence of the Reſurrection cleared, p. 64, &c, and Mr. Chandler's Witneſſes of the Reſurrection re-examined, p. 14—19.

deſign was to ſpirit up the people againſt the Roman government, and carry on ſome political ſcheme, under pretence of reſtoring the kingdom to Iſrael. The whole would have been treated as a national Jewiſh affair, a thing concerted between the chief prieſts and the diſciples; and there would have been a greater clamour raiſed againſt it, than there is now: I am perſuaded that the evidence which was actually given of Chriſt's reſurrection by the apoſtles and diſciples of Chriſt, in oppoſition to their own prejudices, and to the authority and power of the Jewiſh chief prieſts and rulers, and notwithſtanding the perſecutions to which their teſtimony to it expoſed them, was much more convincing and leſs exceptionable than it would have been, if they had had the favour and countenance of the chiefs of the Jewiſh nation, or of thoſe perſons who were of the greateſt intereſt and authority among them.

What has been mentioned may ſerve for a ſpecimen of this writer's objections againſt the accounts of our Saviour's miracles recorded in the evangeliſts: and he might by the ſame way of management, by arbitary ſuppoſitions, and adding or altering circumſtances as he judged proper, have proved the moſt authentic accounts in the Greek or Roman hiſtory to be falſe and incredible. He might at the ſame rate of arguing have undertaken to prove, that there was no ſuch perſon as Jeſus Chriſt, or his apoſtles, or that they were only allegorical perſons, and that Chriſtianity was never planted or propagated in the world at all.

This extraordinary writer thought fit to begin his ſecond Diſcourſe on our Saviour's miracles, with boaſting, that none of the clergy had publiſhed their exceptions againſt what he had offered in his firſt; and that this ſhewed that his cauſe was juſt, and his arguments and authorities unanſwerable. But he did not continue long unanſwered: many learned adverſaries ſoon appeared againſt him: but they were far from imitating him in his low and ſcurrilous way of treating the ſubject. They ſhewed themſelves as much ſuperior in the temper, calmneſs, and ſolid and ſerious manner of treating the argument, as in the goodneſs of their cauſe. They conſidered even his moſt trifling objections; and whatever things he had urged, that had any real or ſeeming difficulty in them (and ſome ſuch things muſt be expected in ancient writings, which relate to times and cuſtoms different from ours,

ours, and especially with regard to facts of an extraordinary nature), were coolly examined, and fully obviated.

The late worthy bishop of London, Dr. Gibson, published on this occasion an excellent pastoral letter, written, as all his are, with great clearness and strength. The learned and ingenious Dr. Zachary Pearce, now Lord Bishop of Rochester, published *The Miracles of Jesus Vindicated*, in four parts, which came out at different times in the year 1729, and were deservedly much esteemed. But the largest answer was that by Dr. Smallbrook, Lord Bishop of St. David's, in two volumes, 8vo. This learned work is intitled, *A Vindication of our Saviour's Miracles; in which Mr. Woolston's Discourses on them are particularly examined; his pretended Authority of the Fathers against the Truth of the literal Sense are set in a just Light; and his Objections, in point of Reason, answered*—London, 1729. There were other good answers published, which also took in the whole of Mr. Woolston's Discourses: such were Mr. Ray's *Vindication of our Saviour's Miracles*, in two parts, the first published in 1727, the second in 1729; and Mr. Stevenson's *Conference on the Miracles of our Saviour*, published in 1730, an ingenious and solid performance. Besides which there were several excellent pamphlets, that were designed to vindicate some particular miracles against Mr. Woolston's exceptions. Such were Mr. Atkinson's *Vindication of the literal Sense of three Miracles of Christ—his turning Water into Wine—his whipping the Buyers and Sellers out of the Temple—and his exorcising the Devils out of two Men—against Mr. Woolston's Objections, in his first and second Discourses on the Miracles of our Saviour; in three Letters to a Friend*, London, 8vo, 1729. Dr. Harris's two sermons on the *Reasonableness of believing in Christ, and the Unreasonableness of Infidelity: with an Appendix, containing brief Remarks upon the case of Lazarus; relating to Mr. Woolston's fifth Discourse of Miracles*, London, 8vo, 1729. That discourse of Mr. Woolston was also animadverted upon by Mr. Simon Brown, in a treatise written with great smartness and spirit, intitled, *A fit Rebuke to a ludicrous Infidel, in some Remarks on Mr. Woolston's fifth Discourse on the Miracles of our Saviour: with a Preface concerning the Prosecution of such Writers by the Civil Power.* London,

London, 8vo, 1732. The following tracts alſo deſerve ſpecial notice, as being written with great clearneſs and judgment. *A Vindication of three of our bleſſed Saviour's Miracles, in Anſwer to the Objections of Mr. Woolſton's fifth Diſcourſe on the Miracles of our Saviour*, by Nathaniel Lardner, now Dr. Lardner, London, 1729. *A Defence of the Scripture Hiſtory, as far as it concerns the Reſurrection of Jairus's Daughter, the Widow's Son at Naim, and Lazarus; in Anſwer to Mr. Woolſton's fifth Diſcourſe*, London; 1729. This is ſaid to have been written by Dr. Henry, who afterwards publiſhed *A Diſcourſe on our Saviour's miraculous Power of Healing; in which the ſix Caſes excepted againſt by Mr. Woolſton are conſidered; being a Continuation of the Defence of Scripture Hiſtory*, London, 1730. And as Mr. Woolſton had bent his efforts with a particular virulence againſt the reſurrection of our bleſſed Lord, this was fully and diſtinctly conſidered, eſpecially in a pamphlet written by Dr. Sherlock, Lord Biſhop of London, intitled, *The Trial of the Witneſſes of the Reſurrection of Jeſus*, London, 1729, which has been very juſtly admired for the polite and uncommon turn, as well as the judicious way of treating the ſubject. There were alſo publiſhed on the ſame occaſion, *An Anſwer to the Jewiſh Rabbi's two Letters againſt Chriſt's Reſurrection, and his raiſing Lazarus from the dead; with ſome Obſervations on Mr. Woolſton's own Reflections on our Saviour's conduct*, London, 1729. *An impartial Examination and full Confutation of the Arguments brought by Mr. Woolſton's pretended Rabbi againſt the Truth of our Saviour's Reſurrection*, London, 8vo, 1730. And two Diſcourſes by Dr. Wade: the firſt, *An Appeal to the Miracles of Jeſus Chriſt for his Meſſiahſhip:* the ſecond, *A Demonſtration of the Truth and Certainty of his Reſurrection from the dead*, London, 8vo, 1729. Among the writers that appeared againſt Mr. Woolſton, Mr. Joſeph Hallet ought not to be forgotten, on the account of his judicious *Diſcourſe of the Reality, Kinds, and Numbers of our Saviour's Miracles, occaſioned by Mr. Woolſton's ſix Diſcourſes:* this was publiſhed in the ſecond volume of his notes and diſcourſes, 8vo, 1732. The laſt I ſhall mention is Mr. Stackhouſe, who publiſhed *A fair State of the Controverſy between Mr. Woolſton and his Adverſaries*, London,

8vo,

8vo. 1730: in which he hath given a very clear account of Mr. Woolſton's objections, and the anſwers that were returned by thoſe who had written againſt him.

Mr. Woolſton publiſhed what he called, *A Defence of his Diſcourſes on the Miracles of our Saviour, againſt the Biſhop of London and St. David's, and his other Adverſaries*, in two pamphlets: the firſt was publiſhed, London, 1729; the ſecond in 1730. Theſe are very trifling performances, in which there is a continued ſtrain of low drollery, but little that has a ſhew of reaſon and argument, in anſwer to what had been ſtrongly urged againſt him. He has ſcarce attempted to take notice of the inſtances which had been brought to ſhew his great diſhoneſty in his quotations, and his groſs falſifications of the fathers and ancient writers. This ſeems to have given him very little diſturbance, though if he had any regard to his own reputation, it highly concerned him to clear himſelf, if he had been able to do it, from ſo heavy a charge.

But I believe you will be of opinion, that I have dwelt long enough upon ſuch an author, though he himſelf boaſts of *cutting out ſuch a piece of work for our Boylean lectures, as ſhall hold them tug* (as he politely expreſſeth it), *ſo long as the miniſtry of the Letter, and a hireling prieſthood laſt* *.

* See his fifth Diſcourſe on Miracles, p. 65, 66.

LET-

LETTER IX.

The preſent Age a happy Time of Liberty, but that Liberty greatly abuſed—An Account of Dr. Tindal's Chriſtianity as old as the Creation—*He pretends a great Regard for the Chriſtian Religion, yet uſes his utmoſt Efforts to diſcard all Revelation, in general, as entirely uſeleſs and needleſs; and particularly ſets himſelf to expoſe the Revelation contained in the holy Scriptures of the Old and New Teſtament—The high Encomiums he beſtows on the Religion of a Deiſt, and on his own Performance—Obſervations upon his Scheme—It is ſhewn to be abſurd and inconſiſtent—What he offers concerning the abſolute univerſal Clearneſs of the Law of Nature to all Mankind, contrary to plain undeniable Fact and Experience—His Scheme really leſs favourable to the Heathens than that of the Chriſtian Divines—An Account of the Anſwers publiſhed againſt him.*

I BELIEVE, Sir, you will agree with me, that never had any nation a fuller enjoyment of liberty than we have had ſince the Revolution. What Tacitus celebrates as the felicity of the times of Trajan, "that men might think as they pleaſed, and ſpeak as they thought," may be more juſtly applied to our own. *Rara temporum felicitate, ubi ſentire quæ velis, et quæ ſentias dicere licet**. The noble author of the *Characteriſtics* is pleaſed to mention it to the honour of the heathen world in ancient Greece and Rome, that "viſionaries and enthuſiaſts were tolerated; and "on the other ſide, philoſophy had as free a courſe, and was "permitted as a balance againſt ſuperſtition. Thus matters were "happily balanced: reaſon had fair play; learning and ſcience "flouriſhed†." It would be no hard matter to ſhew that this repreſentation is not altogether juſt: for, not to mention the caſe of Socrates and others, it is capable of a clear proof, that though they might bear with the diſputes among the ſeveral ſects of philoſophers in their ſchools, yet they would not ſuffer the eſtabliſhed religion of the ſtate to be called in queſtion, and were ready to

* Tacit. Hiſt. l. i. in præm. † Characteriſt. vol. i. p. 18.

puniſh

puniſh thoſe that oppoſed it, of which they gave the moſt ſanguinary proofs when Chriſtianity appeared. But what his Lordſhip has ſaid of thoſe heathen times, the felicity of which he ſo much extols, is undoubtedly true of ours. Viſionaries and enthuſiaſts are not perſecuted, but tolerated: philoſophy has a free courſe: reaſon has fair play: learning and ſcience have greatly flouriſhed. Nor can any age or country be mentioned, in which men have had a greater freedom of openly declaring their ſentiments, either with regard to civil or religious matters. This is our privilege and our glory; but the greateſt advantages are capable of being perverted through the corruption of mankind. Liberty, which, rightly improved, is the beſt friend to truth and to pure and undefiled religion, is often abuſed to a boundleſs licentiouſneſs. Of this we have had many inſtances: but in nothing has it more remarkably appeared, than in the open repeated attempts that have been made againſt all revealed religion. It cannot be pretended, that the adverſaries of Chriſtianity have not been at liberty to produce their ſtrongeſt objections againſt it. They have not only offered whatſoever they were able in a way of reaſon and argument, but they have in many inſtances given a looſe to the moſt offenſive ridicule and reproach: and if they have frequently thought fit to cover their attempts with a pretended regard for Chriſtianity, we may ſafely affirm, that it has not been ſo much out of fear of puniſhment, as that under that diſguiſe they might the better anſwer the end they had in view, and give religion a more deadly wound as pretended friends, than they could as avowed adverſaries. This advantage however hath ariſen from it, that it hath given occaſion to many noble defences of Chriſtianity, and to the clearing various difficulties, and placing the excellence and evidences of our holy religion in the ſtrongeſt and moſt convincing light.

The attacks againſt Chriſtianity, of which I have taken notice in my former letters, ſeemed for ſome time to have been carried on almoſt without intermiſſion. Animated with a ſtrange kind of zeal, the enemies of revelation were unwearied in their endeavours to ſubvert it. When repelled in one attempt, they were not diſcouraged, but renewed it in another form. Of this we now are going to have a freſh inſtance. Woolſton's attempt was

ſo conducted as to raiſe a kind of horror and juſt indignation in all that had not utterly extinguiſhed all remaining regard to the religion in which they were baptized. Such outrageous abuſe, ſuch undiſguiſed reproach caſt upon our bleſſed Saviour and his holy goſpel, ſuch coarſe ridicule and contempt, though it did a great deal of miſchief among men of empty and vicious minds, with whom ſcurrilous jeſt and groſs buffoonry, eſpecially when levelled againſt things ſacred, paſſeth for wit and argument; yet was apt rather to create diſguſt in perſons of any degree of taſte or refinement. It was therefore judged neceſſary, that Chriſtianity ſhould be attacked in a more plauſible way, which had a greater appearance of reaſoning, and might be better fitted to take with perſons of a more rational and philoſophic turn. This ſeems to have been the deſign of Dr. Tindal's laboured performance, intitled, *Chriſtianity as old as the Creation; or, the Goſpel a Republication of the Law of Nature;* which was firſt publiſhed in 4to, London, 1730, and afterwards in 8vo. One would have been apt to expect from the title of this book, that he ſhould have ſet himſelf to prove, that the goſpel is perfectly agreeable to the law of nature; that it hath ſet the great principles of natural religion in the cleareſt light; and that it was deſigned to publiſh and confirm it anew, after it had been very much obſcured and defaced through the corruption of mankind. And if ſo, this author, who every where profeſſeth ſuch a high eſteem for the genuine law and religion of nature, ought to have done all in his power to recommend the goſpel-revelation to the eſteem and veneration of mankind, and to have repreſented it as a great advantage to thoſe that enjoy it, and a ſignal inſtance of the divine goodneſs: And what would induce one farther to think that this was his view, he expreſsly declareth, that Chriſtianity is the *external*, as natural religion is the *internal revelation of the ſame unchangeable will of God*, and that they differ only in the manner of their being communicated: and he propoſeth greatly to *advance the honour of external revelation*, by ſhewing *the perfect agreement there is between that and internal revelation*. He profeſſeth to agree with biſhop Chandler, that "Chriſtianity "itſelf, ſtripped of the additions that policy, miſtake, and the "circumſtances of time have made to it, is a moſt holy religion;

"and

" and that all its doctrines plainly ſpeak themſelves to be the will " of an infinitely wiſe and good God*." Accordingly he honoureth himſelf and his friends with the title of *Chriſtian Deiſts*.

But whoſoever cloſely and impartially examineth his book will find, that all this plauſible appearance and pretended regard to Chriſtianity is only intended as a cover to his real deſign, which was to ſet aſide all revealed religion, and entirely to deſtroy the authority of the ſcriptures. Others have attacked particular parts of the Chriſtian ſcheme, or of its proofs. But this writer has endeavoured to ſubvert the very foundations of it, by ſhewing, that there neither is nor can be any external revelation at all, diſtinct from what he calls *the internal revelation of the law of nature in the hearts of all mankind:* that ſuch external revelation is abſolutely needleſs and uſeleſs; that the original law and religion of nature is ſo perfect, that nothing can poſſibly be added to it by any ſubſequent external revelation whatſoever; nor can God himſelf lay any new commands upon us, or inſtitute any poſitive precepts, additional to the immutable eternal law of nature, without the imputation of erecting an unreaſonable tyranny over his creatures. And as the religion and law of nature is abſolutely perfect, ſo it always was and is clear and obvious to all mankind, even to thoſe of the meaneſt capacity: ſo clear that it is impoſſible to be rendered more plain to any man by any external revelation, than it is to all men without it; that therefore all pretences to ſuch revelation are only owing to enthuſiaſm or impoſture; that reaſon and external revelation are inconſiſtent; and to be governed by the authority of ſuch revelation is really to renounce our reaſon, and to give up our underſtandings to implicit faith: that this hath been the ſource of all the ſuperſtitions and corruptions which have prevailed among mankind: and that therefore the beſt thing that can be done for them is to engage them to throw off all regard to revelation, and to *adhere to the pure ſimple dictates of the light of nature.*

And as he thus endeavoureth to ſet aſide all external ſupernatural revelation as needleſs and uſeleſs, and all pretences to it as vain and groundleſs; ſo he particularly ſetteth himſelf to expoſe the revelation contained in the holy ſcriptures of the Old

* Chriſtianity as old as the Creation, p. 382. edit. 8vo.

and

and New Teſtament. He attempteth to invalidate the original proofs on which the authority of that revelation is founded, and particularly that which is drawn from the miracles that atteſted it: and he alſo taketh pains to prove, that we cannot poſſibly have any aſſurance, that this revelation is tranſmitted to us in a manner which may be ſafely depended upon. He examineth the revelation itſelf, and endeavoureth to ſhew, that it is uncertain and obſcure; that its precepts are delivered in a looſe, general, undetermined manner, ſo as to be incapable of giving clear directions to the bulk of mankind; that the *keys of ſolution* neceſſary for underſtanding the ſcriptures, are what the people are wholly unacquainted with; that, far from being of uſe as a rule to direct men in faith and practice, the ſcriptures are only fit to perplex and miſinform them; that they tend to give them very wrong and unworthy apprehenſions of the Deity, and the duty they owe him; and that there are many things either commanded or approved there, which are apt to lead men aſtray in relation to the duties they owe to one another. He farther endeavoureth to ſhew, that there is a contraſt and oppoſition between the parts of this revelation, particularly between the Old Teſtament and the New. And it may be ſaid upon the whole, that he hath ſpared no pains to rake together whatſoever he thought might be capable of expoſing the ſcriptures, or the Chriſtian religion. He concludes his book with arguing againſt the Chriſtian revelation, from its having not been univerſal in all times and places, and from the corruptions of Chriſtians.

Whilſt he thus uſeth his utmoſt endeavours to expoſe Chriſtianity as a falſely-pretended revelation, and as not only needleſs and uſeleſs, but of pernicious influence to mankind; he hath taken care to make the moſt advantageous repreſentation of that ſcheme of natural religion he would recommend, and to ſhew the great advantage the religion of the deiſts hath above that of the Chriſtians. He ſometimes ſpeaks as if he thought the deiſts were infallibly guided, in making uſe of the reaſon God hath *given them, to diſtinguiſh religion from ſuperſtition*, ſo that they *are ſure not to run into any errors of moment**. On the other hand, he honours all thoſe that are for poſitive precepts in religion with

* Chriſtianity as old as the Creation, p. 336. edit. 8vo.

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the character of Demoniſts: and he repreſents divines in all ages, as, *for the moſt part, mortal enemies to the exerciſe of reaſon*, and even *below brutes*.

He ends his book as he had begun it, with a high panegyric upon his own performance: That by this attempt of his, "as "nothing but rubbiſh is removed, ſo every thing is advanced "which tends to promote the honour of God, and the happineſs "of human ſocieties: That there is none who wiſh well to "mankind, but muſt alſo wiſh his hypotheſis to be true; and that "there cannot be a greater proof of its truth, than that it is in all "its parts ſo exactly calculated for the good of mankind, that "either to add to it, or take from it, will be to their manifeſt "prejudice: That it is a religion, as he hopes he has fully "proved, founded upon ſuch demonſtrable principles, as are "obvious to the meaneſt capacity, and moſt effectually prevents "the growth both of ſcepticiſm and enthuſiaſm."

This may ſuffice to give a general idea of this boaſted performance; but, if carefully examined, it will appear, that it is far from deſerving the magnificent encomiums which he himſelf, and others who are favourers of the ſame cauſe, have ſo liberally beſtowed upon it.

The ſcheme which this writer hath advanced, in order to ſhew that there is no place or need for extraordinary revelation, dependeth chiefly upon two principles. The one is, that the law or religion of nature, obligatory upon all mankind, was from the beginning abſolutely perfect and immutable, ſo that nothing could ever be added to it by any ſubſequent revelation. The other is, that this original law or religion of nature, comprehending all that men were from the beginning obliged to know, believe, profeſs, and practiſe, always was and ſtill is ſo abſolutely clear to all mankind, that it cannot be made clearer to any man by any external revelation, than it is to all men without it.

As to the firſt, he argues, that becauſe God is unchangeable and abſolutely perfect, therefore the religion he gave to man from the beginning muſt have been unchangeable and abſolutely perfect; ſince nothing can proceed from a God of infinite perfection but what is perfect; and that to ſuppoſe any ſubſequent addition to it, or alteration in it, is to ſuppoſe a change in God. But this will not anſwer the author's end, except he can prove

that man is unchangeable too; and that the ſtate of mankind muſt neceſſarily in all ages and ſeaſons continue preciſely the ſame that it was at the beginning of the world: For if there ſhould be a change in the ſtate and circumſtances of mankind, *e. g.* from pure religion to ſuperſtition, or from a righteous and innocent to a guilty and corrupt ſtate, God may ſee fit for excellent ends to lay new injunctions upon men, or make ſome farther diſcoveries of his will, ſuited to that alteration of circumſtances. Nor would this ſhew that he was changeable, but that he was moſt wiſe and good: and it would be a ſtrange thing to affirm, that there could not poſſibly be any farther ſignifications or diſcoveries of the divine will ever made by God himſelf, or any other thing required by him of men, or any additional help or advantages ever offered to them, in any ſuppoſable ſtate or circumſtances of mankind, but what were afforded and made from the beginning of the creation. This is a moſt abſurd ſcheme; and if ſuch a one had been advanced by the advocates for revelation, plentiful ridicule would have been beſtowed upon it.

And it is equally abſurd to pretend, as this writer doth, that God cannot at any time, or in any circumſtance of things, injoin poſitive precepts. If there be any external worſhip to be rendered to God at all (and this gentleman hath not thought fit openly to deny this), it would be the moſt unreaſonable thing in the world to pretend, that he cannot inſtitute or appoint what are the propereſt outward rites, or manner of performing that worſhip; eſpecially ſince our author allows, that men themſelves may appoint them: and to deny God the power which he alloweth to human magiſtrates in ſuch a caſe, is abhorrent to the common ſenſe of mankind; eſpecially, conſidering that there is nothing in which men have more groſsly erred, or as to which they ſtood in greater need of being properly directed, than in what relateth to religious worſhip. I would only farther obſerve, that this writer, in the whole diſpute about poſitive precepts, always ſuppoſes *poſitive* and *arbitrary* precepts to be terms of the ſame ſignification: and by *arbitrary* he means things for which there is no reaſon at all. But this is a very unfair ſtate of the caſe; for when we ſay God hath inſtituted poſitive precepts, though the matter of them be antecedently of an indifferent nature, it is ſtill ſuppoſed there were wiſe reaſons for injoining them, and that,

when

when injoined, they are deſigned to be ſubſervient to things of a moral nature, and to help forward the great ends of all religion. And that the poſitive precepts required in the Chriſtian religion are ſuch, and of an excellent tendency, hath been often clearly ſhewn.

The other main principle of the author's ſcheme is, that that law or religion of nature, which he ſuppoſes to be abſolutely perfect, always was and is ſo clear and obvious to all men, that there is not the leaſt need or uſe of external revelation. This is what he hath greatly laboured; and if ſtrong and confident aſſertions, frequently repeated, may paſs for proofs, he hath fully proved it. This part of his ſcheme coincides with that of Lord Herbert of Cherbury, who had repreſented the five great principles, in which he makes religion to conſiſt, to be common notices, inſcribed by a divine hand in the minds of all men, and univerſally acknowledged in all ages and nations. In like manner the author of *Chriſtianity as old as the Creation* aſſerteth, that that religion, the perfection of which he ſo much extols, is *apparent to the whole world, to thoſe of the meaneſt as well as higheſt capacity*, and who are *unable to read their mother tongue*. He expreſsly declareth, that God could *not more fully make known his will to all intelligent creatures than* he hath done this way; no, *not if he ſhould miraculouſly convey the ſame ideas to all men**. He frequently ſpeaks, as if the principles and obligations of natural religion were ſo clear, that men could not poſſibly miſtake them; that all men ſee them at firſt view; and that the actual knowledge of the law of nature is naturally neceſſary, and inſeparable from rational nature; ſo that it is as impoſſible for any reaſonable creature to be ignorant of it, as it is for animals to live without the pulſe of the heart and arteries.

This ſcheme, though it has been mightily applauded, is contrary to evident fact and experience: It ſuppoſeth the law or religion of nature, in its important principles and obligations, to be neceſſarily known to all mankind, and to be ſo clear that they cannot miſtake it; when nothing is more certain and undeniable, than that they have miſtaken it in very important inſtances, and that ſome of its main principles have been very much per-

* Chriſtianity as old as the Creation, p. 22. edit. 8vo.

verted and obſcured. I ſhall not here repeat what was offered to this purpoſe in a former letter in my remarks on Lord Herbert's ſcheme, in which it is plainly proved, that men have fallen into a groſs darkneſs with reſpect to ſome of thoſe great principles in which that noble writer makes the true religion to conſiſt; and that after all his efforts to the contrary, he hath found himſelf under a neceſſity of acknowledging it. The like acknowledgments the author of *Chriſtianity as old as the Creation* hath been obliged to make. He himſelf in ſeveral parts of his book, though in plain contradiction to his own ſcheme, repreſenteth almoſt all mankind in all ages, excepting the *Free-thinking few**, as having had very unworthy apprehenſions of God, and wrong notions of the religion and law of nature. And no ſmall part of his book is employed in inveighing againſt that ſuperſtition which he ſuppoſeth to have generally prevailed among mankind at all times, and which in his opinion is worſe than Atheiſm; and conſequently it muſt be acknowledged, even according to his own repreſentation of the caſe, that men had fallen from the right knowledge of the religion of nature into great darkneſs and corruption. Cicero was ſo ſenſible of this, that, ſpeaking of *ſome ſmall ſparks of virtue implanted in us*, he complaineth, that they are *ſoon extinguiſhed by corrupt cuſtoms and opinions, ſo that the light of nature no-where appears*†. From whence he infers the great neceſſity and uſefulneſs of philoſophy to direct and aſſiſt us; and certainly this will conclude much more ſtrongly for the neceſſity and uſefulneſs of a divine revelation, which would be much more advantageous, and more to be depended on.

The argument therefore which Dr. Tindal urgeth from the ſuppoſed univerſal clearneſs of the law of nature, to ſhew that there is no need or uſe for external revelation, falls to the ground. And indeed his way of arguing, if it proves any thing, equally proves, that all the writings of philoſophers and moraliſts, all the inſtructions that have been ever given to mankind in matters of religion and morality, have been perfectly needleſs and of no uſe; and that conſequently, all books which have been written

* Chriſtianity as old as the Creation, p. 149.

† Tuſcul. Quæſt. lib. iii. in proœm.

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on theſe ſubjects, the nobleſt in the world, and the beſt worth writing upon, muſt be diſcarded, as well as the ſcriptures: ſince all mankind have ſuch a perfect knowledge of their duty, that they ſtand in no need of inſtruction or information. Yea, he ſometimes repreſents it, as if inſtructing them by words tended only to miſlead them from the knowledge of things. Thus, according to this goodly ſcheme, all men are to be left to what he calls the ſimple dictates of the light of nature, without any inſtruction at all: the certain conſequence of which would be univerſal ignorance and barbariſm. He often expreſſeth himſelf, as if he thought that all men have an equal knowledge of the law of nature; and indeed I do not ſee but that upon his ſcheme it muſt be ſo: yet at other times he ſuppoſeth the knowledge men have of it to be more or leſs clear according to the circumſtances they are in: for he ſays, it is not neceſſary that all men *ſhould have equal knowledge of it, but that all ſhould have ſufficient for the circumſtances they are in**; and talks of a man's *doing his beſt, according as his circumſtances permit, to diſcover the will of God;* and of men's being *accepted, if they live up to their different degrees of light.* But though others may charitably make uſe of this way of ſpeaking, it is hard to ſee how this writer can do it in conſiſtency with his ſcheme; or how he can ſuppoſe any allowances to be made for involuntary errors: ſince according to his repreſentation of the caſe, all errors in matters of religion or morals muſt be voluntary, in oppoſition to the cleareſt univerſal light. Though therefore he ſets up for a mighty advocate for the heathen world, and blames the Chriſtian divines for paſſing too ſevere a cenſure upon them, he himſelf muſt, if he be conſiſtent, judge much more harſhly of them than they: ſince his hypotheſis quite deſtroys the plea with regard to the heathens, drawn from the great darkneſs and difficulties they laboured under; for he poſitively aſſerteth, that the law of nature is ſo clear, that *no well-meaning Gentile could be ignorant of it*†. He muſt therefore ſuppoſe all of them, who were involved in the general ſuperſtition and idolatry, which he himſelf acknowledgeth to be contrary to the law of nature, to have been deſtitute of that ſincerity, which he maketh to be the only title to happineſs, and to the favour of God.

* Chriſtianity as old as the Creation, p. 4. edit. 8vo. † Ibid. p. 36.

It may not be improper to obſerve farther, that though he often ſpeaks of the law of nature, as if it were a ſyſtem of principles and rules fixed and unalterable, to which nothing could ever be added, and in which nothing could ever be altered (which rules and principles he ſuppoſes to be neceſſarily known to all mankind), yet at other times he expreſſes himſelf, as if he thought there were no fixed unchangeable principles and rules of morality at all. The goodneſs of actions is, according to him, to be wholly meaſured by their tendency; and this is to be judged by the circumſtances a man is under, which circumſtances he repreſents as *continually changing**. It appears from ſeveral paſſages, that, after all his magnificent talk of the perfection and immutability of the law of nature, all that he would have to be underſtood by it is only this, that it is the will of God that every man ſhould act, according as the circumſtances he is under point out his duty. This is the ſole univerſal rule or ſtanding law given to all mankind for their conduct, and by which they may know their duty in all caſes whatſoever; as if it were ſufficient to tell men, even the moſt illiterate, that they muſt act as the circumſtances they are placed in do require, without any other or farther direction. But ſurely any one that knows the world and mankind muſt be ſenſible, that if every man were to be left to himſelf, to find out what is good and fit for him to do, merely by what he apprehendeth to be moſt for his own benefit in the circumſtances he is under, and to gratify his appetites and paſſions, as far as he himſelf thinketh to be moſt for his own advantage and happineſs, without any other direction or law to reſtrain or govern him, it would ſoon introduce a very looſe morality. I cannot help looking upon it to be a ſtrange way of thinking, to imagine that it would be better for every man to be left thus to form a ſcheme of religion and morals for himſelf, than to have his duty urged and enforced upon him, by plain and expreſs precepts, in a revelation confirmed by the authority of God himſelf.

As this book made a great noiſe, many good anſwers were returned to it. A ſecond *paſtoral Letter* was publiſhed on this occaſion by the late biſhop of London, which, like his former, compriſed a great deal in a ſmall compaſs, and was very well

* Chriſtianity as old as the Creation, p. 16. 317, 318.

fitted

fitted to anſwer the end it was intended for, to be an antidote againſt the ſpreading infection of infidelity. Several other valuable treatiſes might be mentioned, ſuch as, *The Argument ſet forth in a late Book intitled, "Chriſtianity as old as the Creation," reviewed and confuted in ſeveral Conferences*, by Dr. Thomas Burnet. Dr. Waterland's *Scripture Vindicated;* which was particularly deſigned to vindicate the holy Scripture, which this author had taken great pains to vilify and expoſe: A good account is here given of a great number of paſſages in the ſacred writings, and his objections againſt them are fully obviated. Mr. Law's *Caſe of Reaſon, or Natural Religion, fairly and fully ſtated, in Anſwer to a Book, intitled, "Chriſtianity as old as the Creation."* Mr. Jackſon's *Remarks on a Book, intitled, "Chriſtianity as old as the Creation."* Dr. Stebbing's *Diſcourſe, concerning the Uſe and Advantage of the Goſpel-Revelation, in which are obviated the principal Objections contained in a Book, intitled, "Chriſtianity as old as the Creation,"* London, 8vo. 1731. The ſame learned and judicious writer publiſhed another excellent tract againſt Dr. Tindal, intitled, *A Defence of Dr. Clarke's Evidences of Natural and Revealed Religion, in Anſwer to the fourteenth Chapter of a Book, intitled, "Chriſtianity as old as the Creation,"* London, 8vo. 1731. Mr. Balguy, the worthy author of a *Letter to a Deiſt*, of which ſome notice was taken before in the account of the Earl of Shafteſbury's writings, publiſhed on this occaſion *A ſecond Letter to a Deiſt, concerning a late Book, intitled, "Chriſtianity as old as the Creation;" more particularly that Chapter which relates to Dr. Clarke*, London, 8vo. 1731. And, ſeveral years after, he publiſhed a very valuable tract, which was particularly intended to defend the mediatorial ſcheme, againſt the objections which Dr. Tindal had advanced, intitled, *An Eſſay on Redemption, being the ſecond Part of Divine Rectitude*, London, 8vo. 1741. To theſe ought to be added, a piece which has been deſervedly much eſteemed, written by the ingenious Mr. Anthony Atkey, though without his name, intitled, *The main Argument of a late Book, intitled, "Chriſtianity as old as the Creation," fairly ſtated and examined; or, a ſhort View of the whole Controverſy*, London, 8vo, 1733. Beſides theſe and other tracts that were publiſhed on this occaſion, there were ſome large

anſwers made to this book, of which I ſhall give a more particular account.

The firſt of them that I ſhall mention is intitled, *The Uſefulneſs, Truth, and Excellency of the Chriſtian Revelation, defended againſt the Objections contained in a late Book, intitled, "Chriſtianity as old as the Creation,"* by James Foſter, afterwards Dr. Foſter, London, 8vo. 1731. This is generally and juſtly acknowledged to be an ingenious performance, and written with great clearneſs of thought and expreſſion. It is divided into five chapters. The firſt is deſigned to ſhew the advantages of revelation in general, and particularly of the Chriſtian: it is plainly proved, that whatever the power of reaſon may be ſuppoſed to be, if duly exerciſed and improved to the utmoſt, yet when the light of nature is darkened, and ignorance, idolatry, and ſuperſtition have overſpread the world, which was undoubtedly the caſe when our Saviour appeared, an extraordinary revelation would be highly uſeful, and of great benefit to mankind. He then proceeds to conſider what is the proper evidence of the truth and divinity of any particular revelation; and how thoſe to whom it is given may be ſatisfied that it really came from God: and here it is ſhewn, that miracles, when conſidered in conjunction with the good tendency and excellence of the doctrines, furniſh a proper and ſufficient evidence. In the ſecond chapter, he vindicates the conduct of God's providence in not making the Chriſtian religion univerſally known to all nations, and in all times and ages; and proves, that this is analogous to the general courſe of providence both in the natural and moral world, and that it is conſiſtent with the divine perfections, and conſequently with the notion of its being a divine revelation. In the third chapter, which is the largeſt in the whole book, it is ſhewn, that we have a ſufficient probability, even at this diſtance, of the authenticity, credibility, and purity of the books of the New Teſtament; and that the common people are able to judge of the truth and uncorruptedneſs of a traditional religion: and a good anſwer is returned to the arguments drawn from the change of languages, the different uſe of words, and the ſtyle and phraſe of ſcripture, to prove it an obſcure, perplexed, and uncertain rule. The fourth chapter contains a general defence of poſitive commands, which Dr. Tindal had urged as alone "ſufficient to make all

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" things elſe, that can be ſaid in ſupport of any revelation, totally " ineffectual." It is proved, that they are not repugnant to reaſon, nor ſubverſive of moral obligation, nor inconſiſtent with the wiſdom, juſtice, and goodneſs of God: and that inſtituted religion is not ſuperſtition, and, if rightly underſtood, has no more a tendency to ſuperſtition, than natural religion itſelf. And the fifth contains a particular vindication of the peculiar poſitive inſtitutions of Chriſtianity; in which it is ſhewn, that they are of excellent uſe for begetting and ſtrengthening good moral habits, and for exciting and engaging men to a more diligent practice of moral duties.

Another anſwer, which particularly engaged the attention of the public, was that publiſhed by Dr. John Conybeare, rector of Exeter College, Oxford, late lord biſhop of Briſtol, viz. *A Defence of Revealed Religion, againſt the Exceptions of a late Writer, in his Book intitled* " *Chriſtianity as old as the Creation,*" London, 1732. This book is divided into nine chapters. The firſt is deſigned by the acute and learned author to ſhew, what we are to underſtand by the law or religion of nature, from what the obligation of it ariſes, and how far it extends. He ſhews, that the religion or law of nature does not take in every thing that is founded in the nature or reaſon of things, which ſeems to be the ſenſe the author of *Chriſtianity as old as the Creation* takes it in throughout his whole book, but only ſuch a collection of doctrines and precepts, as is diſcernable to us in the uſe of our natural faculties: and this, though founded in nature, becomes then only properly a law to us, when it is regarded as the will of God, the ſupreme legiſlator; and our obligation to it, ſtrictly ſpeaking, is founded on the divine ſanction of rewards and puniſhments. In the ſecond chapter it is ſhewn, that the law or religion of nature, in the ſenſe already explained, is not abſolutely perfect. Since the law of nature is only what men are capable of diſcerning, in the uſe of their natural faculties, it can be no more perfect than human reaſon. If the law of nature were abſolutely perfect, it muſt have ſuch a clearneſs as to the meaning and authority of it, as can admit of nothing more in any poſſible circumſtance; it muſt have ſuch a ſtrength of inforcement, that it cannot be heightened in any way whatſoever; and ſuch an extent of matter, as to comprehend every thing that

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may be fit and proper to be known or done, and not to admit of any poſſible article to be added to it. And he plainly proves, that the law or religion of nature is not abſolutely perfect in any of theſe reſpects. Chapter third is intended to ſhew, that the law of nature is not immutable, in ſuch a ſenſe eſpecially as to be incapable of admitting any additional precepts. And here the queſtion concerning poſitive precepts is accurately ſtated, and it is proved that God may appoint them; and an anſwer is returned to the author's objections to the contrary. In chapter fourth he inquires, whether natural and revealed religion be neceſſarily the ſame; and if not, wherein the proper diſtinction between them both doth conſiſt. In the former chapter he had ſhewn, that poſitive precepts might be given; here he carries it farther, and proves that ſome poſitive inſtitutions might reaſonably be expected, if ever God ſhould reveal his will at all; both as tokens of his authority and our ſubmiſſion, and for the better order and decency of his worſhip, and the outward part of religion, and for the increaſe and advancement of inward piety. The ſame thing is urged from the concurrent ſenſe of mankind in all ages, and under all religions. It is further ſhewn, there are other things of higher importance in which natural and revealed religion differ, though they are not properly oppoſed to each other, *e. g.* with regard to principles and doctrines not diſcoverable by nature's light, or as to precepts which, though founded in the nature of things, yet are not certainly knowable in the uſe of our own reaſon. They alſo differ in point of clearneſs, and in efficacy. He inſtances particularly in the aſſurance given us of the pardon of ſin, divine aſſiſtances, and the eternal retributions of a future ſtate. Chapter fifth is deſigned to ſhew, that a proper rule of life is not perfectly and eaſily diſcoverable by every man, even by thoſe of the meaneſt capacity: and here it is evinced, that the author's own ſcheme of natural religion, which he pretends is ſo obvious to all mankind, is perplexed, obſcure, and defective. In chapter ſixth he inquires, whether a proper rule of life be more eaſily and perfectly diſcoverable by us in the uſe of our own reaſon, than the proof or meaning of a revelation can be. He ſhews the poſſibility of immediate revelation or inſpiration, and that this gives the higheſt evidence: and that as to traditional revelation, though the evidence be not ſtrictly

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demonſtrative, it may be ſuch as is ſufficient to determine the aſſent of a ſober thinking man: and he anſwers what the author had brought to prove, that the ſenſe and meaning of ſuch a revelation cannot be fixed and aſcertained. Chapter ſeventh is deſigned to ſhew, that a revelation is expedient, in order to a more eaſy, more perfect, and more general knowledge of the rule of life. This is diſtinctly evinced, both with regard to the wiſer and better part of men, particularly the philoſophers, and with reſpect to perſons of a lower rank and meaner abilities: and a good anſwer is made to what the author had urged, concerning the ſuppoſed inconſiſtency between our being governed by reaſon and revelation. In chapter eighth it is ſhewn, that a revelation is expedient in order to inforce the general practice of the rule of life: that the mere pleaſure of doing well, or a moral taſte or ſenſe, is not alone a ſufficient balance for all the inconveniences of doing otherwiſe, amidſt all the embarraſſments of paſſion and temptation; nor if to this be added the civil ſanctions of human authority, are theſe alone ſufficient: for theſe are deſigned not ſo much to reward virtues, ſeveral of which do not come under the cognizance of human courts, as to puniſh crimes, and thoſe only ſuch as tend to the hurt of the ſociety. Virtue can only be ſufficiently inforced by ſanctions eſtabliſhed by God himſelf; and a revelation is expedient for that purpoſe. He concludes this chapter with giving a clear anſwer to two objections urged by the author: the one is, that if a revelation be expedient to be made to any, it muſt be equally expedient to be made to all, and at all times: the other is, that the revelation hath not in fact anſwered that purpoſe for which we affirm it to be expedient. The ninth, and laſt, chapter is intended to evince, that there is ſufficient evidence of the reality of a revelation, eſpecially of the Chriſtian. He obſerves, that what is uſually called the internal evidence of a revelation is not ſtrictly and properly an evidence, but only a neceſſary condition or qualification of a true revelation: that external proof is the only direct evidence of a divine revelation; and this conſiſteth in miracles, as including prophecies, which may be conſidered as one ſort of miracles. He ſhews what reaſon we have to believe, that the miracles recorded to have been done in favour of the Chriſtian religion were really wrought;

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and that, ſuppoſing them to have been wrought, they were real and ſatisfactory proofs of a divine original.

There was another anſwer to Dr. Tindal's book, which I ſhould not have choſen to take notice of, if the method I am in did not make it proper for me to do ſo, as I am ſenſible how hard it is for an author to ſpeak of his own work, without offending his own modeſty, or the delicacy of the reader. It was publiſhed at Dublin in two volumes, 8vo. in 1733, under the title of *An Anſwer to a late Book, intitled* "*Chriſtianity as old as the Creation;*" and was afterwards reprinted at London in 1740. It is much larger, and takes a wider compaſs than the other anſwers; and therefore the account here given of it will be alſo larger. It is divided into two parts: In the firſt part, which takes up the firſt volume, the author's account of the law of nature is conſidered, and his ſcheme is ſhewn to be inconſiſtent with reaſon, and with itſelf, and of ill conſequence to the intereſts of virtue, and to the good of mankind. This volume conſiſteth of eleven chapters, beſides a large introduction, containing obſervations upon the author's ſpirit and deſign, and the way of reaſoning made uſe of by him, and others of our modern deiſts. In the firſt chapter there is a general account of that writer's ſcheme, which lies ſcattered in his book with little order or method, but is here brought together in one view, and the various and inconſiſtent ſenſes, in which he takes the law of nature, examined. The ſecond chapter relates to the vaſt extent he gives to the law of nature, as taking in whatſoever is founded in the nature of things. This is ſhewn to be a ſtrange hypotheſis, when he is ſpeaking of that law which he ſuppoſes to be known to all men, as if the whole reaſon and nature of things were open to every man; whereas, taken in this comprehenſive view, it is only perfectly known to God himſelf. In the third and fourth chapters, what he hath offered to prove, that the religion or law of nature given to mankind at the beginning was ſo abſolutely perfect that nothing could ever be afterwards added to it, and particularly that God could never inſtitute any poſitive precepts, is diſtinctly conſidered: and it is proved, that God may both give men new laws ſuited to new circumſtances of things, and may, if he ſeeth fit, inſtitute poſitive precepts; and that theſe may anſwer

ſwer very valuable ends; and particularly, that there were wiſe reaſons for the poſitive inſtitutions both of the Jewiſh and Chriſtian religion. The fifth and ſixth chapters relate to what our author had advanced concerning the univerſal clearneſs of the law of nature. It is ſhewn at large, that it is not ſo obvious to all mankind, as to render an extraordinary revelation needleſs: that even as to thoſe principles and duties which, abſolutely ſpeaking, are diſcoverable by human reaſon, revelation may be of great uſe to give a clearer and more certain knowledge of them, than the bulk of mankind, or even the wiſeſt, could have without it. Beſides which, there are ſeveral things of great importance to us to know, of which we could not have a certain aſſurance by the mere light of natural reaſon without revelation, and with regard to which, therefore, an expreſs revelation from God would be of ſignal advantage, and ought to be received with great thankfulneſs: as particularly, with relation to the methods of our reconciliation with God when we have offended him, the terms and extent of forgiveneſs, and the nature, greatneſs, and duration of that reward, which it ſhall pleaſe God to confer on imperfect obedience. In the 7th and 8th chapters it is evinced, that this writer's ſcheme of natural religion is very defective; and that he giveth a wrong account of ſome of the main principles and duties of the law of nature: that he in effect depriveth it of its ſtrongeſt ſanctions; and that his ſcheme tendeth to take away the fear of God, and to make men eaſy in their ſins. The ninth is deſigned to ſhew, that his ſcheme is not fitted to anſwer the end he propoſes by it, the delivering mankind from ſuperſtition and prieſtcraft; and that a ſtrict adherence to the Chriſtian revelation in its original purity would have a happier influence this way. The tenth chapter relates to thoſe paſſages, in which he pretends to deſcribe the religion of deiſts, and to draw a parallel between that and Chriſtianity; and it is ſhewn, that the advantages he would appropriate to deiſm do much more properly belong to the Chriſtian religion, as laid down in the holy Scriptures. In the eleventh chapter, his pretence of introducing a new and glorious ſtate of things is examined; and the whole concludes with a brief repreſentation of the pernicious tendency and manifold inconſiſtencies of the author's ſcheme.

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In the ſecond part, the authority and uſefulneſs of the revelation contained in the ſacred writings of the Old and New Teſtament, is aſſerted and vindicated againſt the objections and miſrepreſentations of this writer. This part is divided into ſixteen chapters. The firſt contains ſome conſiderations concerning divine revelation in general, and what are the proper characters and evidences by which it may be known that ſuch a revelation is really given; and that our being governed by the authority of ſuch a revelation is not inconſiſtent with our being governed by reaſon, as this author has attempted to prove. The ſecond chapter examines his objections againſt the characters of the firſt publiſhers and witneſſes of the Jewiſh and Chriſtian revelation; and it is ſhewn, that we have all the aſſurance that we can reaſonably deſire, that they were neither impoſed upon themſelves, nor had a deſign to impoſe upon others; nor indeed, as things were circumſtanced, had it in their power to do ſo, if they had deſigned it. In the third chapter his objections againſt the proof from miracles are conſidered. It is ſhewn, that they are neither needleſs nor uncertain proofs: that there are certain marks and characters by which true divine miracles may be diſtinguiſhed from thoſe pretended to be wrought by impoſture, or the agency of evil ſpirits; and that theſe characters are to be found in the miracles wrought in favour of the Jewiſh and Chriſtian revelation. The deſign of the fourth chapter is to prove, that we have all the evidence that can be reaſonably deſired: that the revelation contained in the holy Scriptures, with an account of the facts and atteſtations by which that revelation was originally confirmed and eſtabliſhed, is tranſmitted to us with ſuch a degree of purity and certainty, as may be ſafely depended upon: and this is particularly ſhewn with regard to the writings of the Old Teſtament, eſpecially the law of Moſes. In the fifth chapter, the authority and integrity of the ſacred records of the New Teſtament are aſſerted and vindicated againſt the author's exceptions: and that we have both ſufficient external proofs of their being ſafely tranſmitted to us, and that they carry in them the greateſt internal evidences of genuine truth and uncorruptedneſs, that can be found in any writings whatſoever. The ſixth chapter ſhews, that the wonderful ſucceſs the goſpel met with, and its ſpeedy and general propagation, furniſh a ſtrong proof, as the caſe

was

was circumſtanced, of the truth of the facts on which it is founded. The following chapters are deſigned to conſider his objections againſt Scripture, drawn from the nature and manner of the revelation there contained. And firſt, his attempt to prove, that it is uncertain and obſcure, is obviated. What he urgeth to this purpoſe, concerning the ambiguity and uncertainty of words, concerning the ſcriptures being written in dead languages, and that the tranſlations are not to be depended on, is in the ſeventh chapter diſtinctly examined. The eighth relates to the keys of ſolution neceſſary for underſtanding the Scripture, which he pretends the people are wholly unacquainted with; and what he offers concerning the figurative language of Scripture, and the parables and proverbial expreſſions made uſe of by our Saviour, is conſidered. The ninth chapter makes it appear, that many of thoſe paſſages, which this writer cenſures as obſcure and apt to miſlead the people, are ſo noble and of ſuch excellent uſe, that a candid critic would have judged them worthy of admiration. In the tenth, an anſwer is given to his objections againſt the goſpel precepts, drawn from their being delivered in a looſe, general, and undetermined manner; and his argument for the obſcurity of ſcripture, from the diviſions among Chriſtians about the ſenſe of it, and his pretence that this would infer the neceſſity of an infallible guide, is ſhewn to be vain and inconcluſive. The eleventh and twelfth chapters contain a diſtinct and particular examination of all thoſe paſſages, whereby he pretends to prove, that the ſcriptures tend to lead the people into wrong apprehenſions of God, and into a wrong practice with relation to the duties they owe to one another. Chapter thirteenth conſiders what he has offered to ſhew, that there is a contraſt between the ſpirit of the Old and New Teſtament. In the fourteenth and fifteenth chapters, the Moſaic account of man's original dignity and the fall, and the Chriſtian doctrine of a Mediator, are vindicated againſt this writer's exceptions. The laſt chapter contains an anſwer to two objections againſt Chriſtianity, which have been often urged, and with which the author concludes his book: the one drawn from its not having been given and made known to all mankind in all ages and places from the beginning; the other drawn from the corruptions of Chriſtians.

And

And it is ſhewn, that no argument will juſtly hold from either of theſe againſt the uſefulneſs and divine authority of the Chriſtian revelation.

There was alſo a ſolid and excellent anſwer to *Chriſtianity as old as the Creation*, drawn up by the reverend Mr. Simon Brown, and which well deſerves a particular notice. But I fear I may be thought to have been too tedious and particular already in the account that has been given of the anſwers to this book, though the opinion many have entertained of it, as if it were a very formidable attack upon Chriſtianity, will I hope in ſome degree plead my excuſe.

LETTER X.

Another Attempt againſt Chriſtianity in Dr. Morgan's Book, called, The Moral Philoſopher—*He ſeems to acknowledge the great Uſefulneſs of Revelation, but leaves no Way of knowing when a Revelation is really given—He diſcards all Authority, even a divine one, in Matters of Religion, and all Proof from Miracles and Prophecy—His Invectives againſt the Law of Moſes and the Prophets—Though he profeſſeth himſelf a Chriſtian on the Foot of the New Teſtament, he inſinuates ſeveral Reflections on the Character of our Saviour, and endeavours to invalidate the Atteſtation given to Chriſtianity by the extraordinary Gifts and Powers of the Holy Ghoſt—He pretends, that the Apoſtles preached different Goſpels, and that the New Teſtament is a Jumble of inconſiſtent Religions—His Book fully confuted in the Anſwers that were publiſhed againſt him—Some Account of thoſe Anſwers, as alſo of the ſecond and third Volumes of the* Moral Philoſopher.

SIR,

AS you ſtill inſiſt upon my continuing the correſpondence on the ſubject of my former letters, I ſhall now take notice of a freſh attempt againſt Chriſtianity, in a book that appeared with a pompous title, *The Moral Philoſopher, in a Dialogue between Philalethes, a Chriſtian Deiſt, and Theophanes, a Chriſtian Jew*—"In which the grounds and reaſons of religion in general, "and particularly of Chriſtianity as diſtinguiſhed from the re- "ligion of nature; the different methods of conveying and pro- "poſing moral truth to the mind; and the neceſſary marks or "criteria on which they muſt all equally depend; the nature of "poſitive laws, &c. with many other matters of the utmoſt con- "ſequence to religion, are fairly conſidered and debated, and the "arguments on both ſides impartially repreſented," London, 8vo. 1737. The author of this book, Dr. Morgan, ſeems at firſt view to go much farther in his conceſſion, than other his fellow-labourers in the ſame cauſe. If we were to judge by ſome parts of his book, we ſhould be ready to look upon him as having very friendly diſpoſitions towards the Chriſtian religion; ſince

he ſeems expreſsly to acknowledge the great uſefulneſs of divine revelation in general, and of the Chriſtian revelation in particular. He ſpeaks of man's natural weakneſs and inability; and repreſents thoſe as conceited of themſelves, who in the preſent ſtate of mankind talk of the *ſtrength of human reaſon in matters of religion.* He obſerves, that at the time of Chriſt's appearing, "mankind in general were in a ſtate of groſs ignorance and "darkneſs, with reſpect to the true knowledge of God, and of "themſelves, and of all thoſe moral relations and obligations we "ſtand in to the Supreme Being, and to one another: That they "were under great uncertainty concerning a future ſtate, and "the concern of divine providence in the government of the "world, and at the ſame time were filled with a proud and "vain conceit of their own natural abilities and ſelf-ſufficiency: "That our Saviour's doctrines on theſe heads, though they ap-"peared to be the true and genuine principles of nature and rea-"ſon, when he had ſet them in a proper light, yet were ſuch as "the people had never heard or thought of before, and never "would have known, without ſuch an inſtructor, ſuch means "and opportunities of knowledge: That they who would judge "uprightly of the ſtrength of human reaſon in matters of morality "and religion, under the preſent corrupt and degenerate ſtate of "mankind, ought to take their eſtimate from thoſe parts of the "world which never had the benefit of revelation; and this per-"haps might make them leſs conceited of themſelves, and more "thankful to God for the light of the goſpel." He aſks, "if the "religion of nature, under the preſent pravity and corruption of "mankind, were written with ſufficient ſtrength and clearneſs "upon every man's heart; why might not a Chineſe, or an In-"dian, draw up as good a ſyſtem of natural religion as a Chriſ-"tian, and why have we never met with any ſuch?" He adds, that "let us take Confucius, Zoroaſter, Plato, Socrates, or the "greateſt moraliſt that ever lived without the light of revelation, "and it will appear, that their beſt ſyſtems of morality were in-"termixed and blended with ſo much ſuperſtition, and ſo many "groſs abſurdities, as quite eluded and defeated the main deſign "of them*". This author could ſcarce have declared more expreſsly than he hath here done againſt Tindal's darling ſcheme,

* Moral Philoſopher, vol. i. p. 144, 145.

concerning

concerning ſuch an abſolute univerſal clearneſs and ſufficiency of the light of nature in the preſent ſtate of mankind, as renders revelation entirely needleſs and uſeleſs. To which it may be added, that he ſpeaks in many paſſages very honourably of Jeſus Chriſt, and the religion he hath introduced, as having brought clearer diſcoveries of our duty, and enforced it by ſtronger motives, and provided more effectual aids, than ever was done before. And accordingly he expreſsly declareth himſelf to be a *Chriſtian on the foot of the New Teſtament.*

If we were to form our judgment of him merely from ſuch paſſages as theſe, it might be thought to be doing wrong to our moral philoſopher, to rank him in the liſt of the deiſtical writers: but by a prevarication and a diſingenuity which is not eaſily paralleled, except among ſome of thoſe that have appeared on the ſame ſide, under all theſe fair pretences and diſguiſes, he hath covered as determined a malice againſt the honour and authority of the Chriſtian revelation, as any of thoſe that have written before him.

It is not eaſy to form a diſtinct notion of what he underſtandeth by that revelation, the uſefulneſs of which he would be thought to acknowledge. He granteth, "that God may, if he thinks fit, communicate his will by *immediate inſpiration*, or *ſupernatural illumination*; yea, and that what he thus communicates may come with evidence equal to a mathematical demonſtration*". Yet he plainly intimates, that it can never be proved, that God had ever thus communicated his will; and treats ſuch inſpiration as the invention of our *ſpiritual ſcholaſtics* or *ſyſtematical divines*. By ſeveral paſſages of his book, eſpecially if compared with what he ſaith in his ſecond volume, which he publiſhed in defence of it, it appeareth, that by *revelation* he underſtandeth any diſcovery of truth, in *what way ſoever a man comes by it*, even *though it be by the ſtrength and ſuperiority of his own natural faculties*†: So that all that have diſcovered rational or moral truth by their own ſtudy and application, in the uſe of their natural faculties, may be ſaid, according to this account of it, to have had the light of revelation: and if ſo, it is not eaſy to ſee how he could conſiſtently repreſent whole na-

* Moral Philoſopher, vol. i. p. 83, 84.

† Ibid. p. 343. vol. ii. p. 12, 13. 25, 26. 44.

tions,

tions, among whom he reckoneth the Indians and Chineſe, as *having never had the benefit of revelation;* or how he could ſay, that the moſt eminent philoſophers and moraliſts, ſuch as Confucius, Zoroaſter, Plato, Socrates, *lived without the light of revelation.* For will he ſay, that none of them had any diſcovery or manifeſtation of rational moral truth made to them in any way whatſoever, no, not ſo much as in the exerciſe of their own natural faculties?

The great principle he hath laid down, and which runs through his whole book, is, that there is but one certain and infallible mark or criterion of divine truth, or of any doctrine or law as coming from God, and that is, the moral truth, reaſon or fitneſs of the thing itſelf, when it comes to be fairly propoſed to, and conſidered by the mind or underſtanding. He frequently declareth, that we are not to receive any thing as true in religion upon any authority whatſoever*, or upon any other foundation than its own intrinſic evidence, or moral fitneſs: and this he explaineth to be its conducibleneſs to our happineſs, as appearing to our reaſon, independently of all authority: So that after all his fair pretences about the benefit of revelation, we are not to receive any thing upon the authority of revelation at all. Suppoſing any perſons to have been extraordinarily ſent of God, to make a diſcovery of his will concerning truth or duty, whatever credentials they produce to prove their divine miſſion, we are not to receive any thing upon that authority, no more than if they were not thus extraordinarily ſent of God. The doctrines and laws they deliver as from God, in what way ſoever they are atteſted and confirmed, are really and entirely on the ſame footing with the opinion of philoſophers or moraliſts, who do not pretend to be extraordinarily ſent of God at all; *i. e.* we are to believe the doctrines they teach, if upon examining them we find them to be true, by reaſons drawn from the nature of things; and we are to ſubmit to their precepts and directions, if upon conſidering them we are ſatisfied that they tend to our own advantage and happineſs; but their authority, abſtractly from the reaſon of the thing, muſt have no weight to determine us. Thus the proper uſe and advantage of revelation, which is to aſſure us by a di-

* Moral Philoſopher, vol. ii. p. 6. 21, &c.

vine

vine teſtimony of the truth of things, which either we could not have known at all, or not ſo certainly or clearly, by our own unaſſiſted reaſon; and with regard to our practice, to direct us to our duty, and bind it upon us by expreſs precepts, confirmed by a divine authority, is entirely ſet aſide by this author. Accordingly he will not allow either miracles or prophecy to be any proof of divine revelation, or any reaſon at all for our believing any doctrines, or ſubmitting to any laws, which have this atteſtation given to them. This being the true ſtate of the caſe, according to him—that nothing is to be received upon the authority of revelation—it is to no great purpoſe to inquire how this revelation is communicated to us. Yet he makes a great noiſe about the uncertainty of the manner of conveying a revelation to us. He frequently ſeems to make a mighty difference between *immediate* and *traditional revelation;* and ſometimes puts on an appearance of granting, that inſpiration or extraordinary revelation from God is a ſufficient ground of aſſurance to the perſon or perſons to whom this revelation is originally and immediately communicated. But upon a cloſe examination, and by comparing ſeveral paſſages in his book, it will be found, that he does not, and indeed cannot in conſiſtency with his ſcheme, allow, that thoſe perſons to whom this revelation is immediately made, have any way of being ſure of the truth of what is thus communicated, but by the reaſon of the thing, by its own intrinſic evidence, or apparent tendency to our benefit. And thoſe to whom this revelation is traditionally communicated, may have the ſame kind of aſſurance; *i. e.* they may believe it, if upon examining they find it to be true, by arguments drawn from the nature and reaſon of the thing. So that, upon his ſcheme, immediate revelation makes no difference, though he often talks as if there were a very great one.

It appeareth upon this view, that though he ſometimes ſeems abſolutely to contradict and ſubvert the ſcheme of the author of *Chriſtianity as old as the Creation;* yet at the bottom, his own ſcheme cometh pretty much to the ſame thing. He, as well as that author, is for diſcarding all authority, even a divine one, in matters of religion; and repreſents the receiving any thing purely upon ſuch authority, as a renouncing our reaſon. According to him, the only way any man, even of the meaneſt capacity, can

have to be fully aſſured of the truth of any doctrine in religion, is by the reaſon of the thing, or its own intrinſic evidence, independent of all authority or teſtimony: and in like manner, with regard to practice, the only way any man hath of knowing any thing to be his duty, is its conduciblenes to his own happineſs in the circumſtances he is in; of which every man is to be the judge for himſelf. To put all duty and obedience upon this foot, would go a great way to diſſolve all bands of government, human and divine: ſince upon this ſcheme, it is in effect left to men themſelves, whether and how far they ſhall obey; *i. e.* ſo far only as they apprehend the thing required to tend to their own happineſs. And certainly it cannot be denied, that conſidering the preſent darkneſs and corruption of mankind, and how much they are influenced by their appetites and paſſions, they would be in great danger, if left to themſelves, of forming wrong judgments concerning their own happineſs, and what is conducible to it, or connected with it. Such a ſcheme might be conſiſtently advanced by Dr. Tindal, who ſuppoſed, though contrary to evident fact and experience, that the whole law of nature and fitneſs of things is obvious to all mankind, even to thoſe that cannot read their mother tongue. But it ſeems not ſo eaſily reconcileable to the conceſſions made by the *Moral Philoſopher*, who acknowledgeth the preſent *weakneſs* and *inability* of reaſon; and that the law of nature is not written *with ſufficient ſtrength and clearneſs in every man's heart*, in the *preſent corrupt and degenerate ſtate of mankind*.

We have ſeen the regard this writer hath to revelation in general. As to the revelation contained in the holy Scriptures, he expreſsly and avowedly rejecteth the Old Teſtament, and openly declareth that he will have nothing to do with it in his religion. He repreſenteth the law of Moſes, as "having neither truth nor "goodneſs in it, and as a wretched ſcheme of ſuperſtition, blind"neſs, and ſlavery, contrary to all reaſon and common ſenſe, "ſet up under the ſpecious popular pretence of a divine inſtruc"tion and revelation from God." And he endeavours to prove, that this was the ſentiment of St. Paul. Among other heavy charges which he hath advanced againſt that law, one is, that it encouraged human ſacrifices, as the higheſt act of religion and devotion, when offered not to idols, but to God; and he takes occaſion

occaſion to conſider the caſe of Abraham's being commanded to offer up Iſaac, which he repreſents as abſolutely unhinging and diſſolving the whole law of nature. He then goes on to conſider the ſpirit of prophecy. He repreſenteth the Urim and Thummim as a prieſtly cheat, and afterwards proceedeth to make a very odious, though inconſiſtent, repreſentation of the character and conduct of the ancient prophets; againſt whom he exclaimeth as the great diſturbers of their country, the authors of all the civil wars and revolutions in the kingdoms of Iſrael and Judah, and the cauſe of the final ruin of both; though the contrary is evident from the very hiſtorical accounts to which he pretendeth to appeal. And he praiſeth Ahab and Jezebel, and other idolatrous princes, for having endeavoured to deſtroy them.

As to the New Teſtament, though he frequently affecteth to ſpeak with great veneration of Jeſus Chriſt, yet he inſinuateth very baſe and unworthy reflections upon his perſon and character: That he pretended to be the Meſſiah foretold by the prophets, though he very well knew that thoſe prophets had only ſpoken of a temporal Jewiſh prince, who was to ariſe and reign in Judea; and that accordingly he ſuffered himſelf to be carried about by the mob as their Meſſiah for a twelvemonth together; and did not renounce that character till his death, when he abſolutely diſclaimed his being the Meſſiah foretold in the prophetical writings, and died upon that renunciation. As to the apoſtles, the firſt authorized teachers and publiſhers of the religion of Jeſus, he affirms, that they themſelves never ſo much as pretended to be under the unerring guidance and inſpiration of the Holy Ghoſt: that they differed among themſelves about the moſt concerning parts of revelation; and preached different, and even contrary, goſpels: and that all the apoſtles, except St. Paul, preached what he calls the Jewiſh goſpel, viz. *ſalvation by Jeſus Chriſt as the Jewiſh Meſſiah, i. e.* the national prince and deliverer of the Jews. This, which he all along explodes as falſe and abſurd, he repreſents as the only proper eſſential article of the Chriſtian faith. As to the atteſtations given to our Saviour's divine miſſion, and to the doctrines taught by the apoſtles, by miracles, prophecy, and the extraordinary gifts of the Holy Ghoſt, he abſolutely denieth them to be any proofs at all. Finally, though he profeſſeth himſelf to be a *Chriſtian on the foot of the New*

Teſtament, yet he repreſenteth it as leaning ſtrongly towards Judaiſm, which is, in his opinion, a ſyſtem of ſuperſtition and *tyranny*. He pretends, that Chriſt's own diſciples repreſented things according to their Jewiſh prejudices, and therefore *are not to be depended upon for a juſt account either of doctrines or facts:* and that the New Teſtament was corrected, reviſed, and publiſhed by the Jews, who altered it according to their own prejudices and falſe opinions; ſo that, as it now ſtands, it is a ſyſtem of Judaiſm, a *jumble of inconſiſtent religions*.

You will allow me here to obſerve, that a writer muſt have an uncommon degree of confidence, to repreſent the New Teſtament as corrupted and altered by the Jews according to their own prejudices and falſe opinions, when not one of their peculiar and moſt darling notions and prejudices is to be found in this book, but much to the contrary; whereas, if they corrupted it at all, it muſt be ſuppoſed that they would have corrupted it in favour of thoſe notions and prejudices. No-where is the obſervance of the Moſaic law preſcribed to Chriſtians, or inſiſted upon as neceſſary to the favour of God under the goſpel. The Meſſiah there ſpoken of is the author of a ſpiritual ſalvation, and the Saviour of the world, not the national deliverer of the Jews only. And the Gentiles are repreſented as incorporated into his church and kingdom, and as ſharers in his benefits, equally with the converted Jews. The New Teſtament is ſo far from being a jumble of inconſiſtent religions, that it is evidently one and the ſame ſcheme of religion that is carried on in the writings of the Evangeliſts, the Acts of the Apoſtles, and the Apoſtolical Epiſtles. The ſame doctrines are every-where taught, relating to God, to our Lord Jeſus Chriſt, the great and only mediator between God and man, and the methods of our redemption and ſalvation through him; relating to the terms of our acceptance with God, to the reſurrection of the dead, the general judgment, and the eternal retributions of a future ſtate. The ſame excellent laws and precepts are every-where inculcated, the ſame duties injoined towards God and man, the ſame purity of heart and life indiſpenſably required, the ſame noble motives are every-where propoſed to animate our obedience, the ſame diſcoveries and diſplays of the divine grace and mercy, the ſame encouragements given to the truly penitent, the ſame gracious aſſiſtances promiſed and provided

provided for the upright and ſincere, the ſame awful threatnings denounced againſt thoſe that go on in a courſe of preſumptuous ſin and diſobedience. Thus one beautiful and harmonious ſcheme of religion appears throughout, uniform and conſiſtent in all its parts, which ſhews that thoſe ſacred writings have not undergone any material corruption. Some have found fault, that ſome of thoſe writings ſeem to have been written occaſionally, and that the Chriſtian religion is not delivered there in a ſyſtematical way: but it has been much more wiſely ordered? If it had been delivered once for all in a formal ſyſtem, it might have been more eaſily altered and corrupted, or at leaſt there would have been greater ground of ſuſpicion that it was ſo: whereas, as the caſe now ſtands, the doctrines and laws of it, and the moſt important facts relating to it, are repeated and inculcated in ſo many places, and on ſo many different occaſions, that without a total alteration and corruption of thoſe original writings, which could not be effected, the religion muſt ſtill be maintained and preſerved.

But to return to our *Moral Philoſopher*, he honoureth himſelf, and thoſe of his ſentiments, with the title of *Chriſtian Deiſts*, as the author of *Chriſtianity as old as the Creation* had done before him, as if they only were the true Chriſtians; and brandeth all others, *i. e.* thoſe that acknowledge the divine authority of the Chriſtian religion, as taught in the New Teſtament, with the character of *Chriſtian Jews*. He frequently inveighs againſt all *hiſtorical faith*, and *books of hiſtorical religion*, as he calls the holy Scriptures, as of no uſe or importance at all; as if the belief of the important facts recorded in the goſpel, relating to our Lord Jeſus Chriſt, had nothing to do with the faith of a Chriſtian. All the religion he is pleaſed to allow to thoſe whom he characterizeth as Chriſtian Jews, is only an *hiſtorical, political, clerical, mechanical faith and religion*; whilſt he appropriateth *real religion*, and *moral truth and righteouſneſs*, to himſelf, and thoſe of his own faction.

One of the firſt tracts which appeared againſt the *Moral Philoſopher* was an ingenious piece, written by Mr. Joſeph Hallet, viz. *The Immorality of the Moral Philoſopher, being an Anſwer to a Book lately publiſhed, intitled, "The Moral Philoſopher,"* 8vo. 1737. He afterwards publiſhed *A Vindication* of it *in a Letter to the Moral Philoſopher*, who had anſwered it. Some time

time after, there were two large anſwers publiſhed to that book, of both which I ſhall give a diſtinct account. The firſt I ſhall mention is intitled, *Euſebius, or the true Chriſtian's Defence, againſt a late Book, intitled,* "*The Moral Philoſopher*, Cambridge, 8vo. 1739, by John Chapman, M.A. now Dr. Chapman. In this learned and accurate work, the author doth not examine the whole of the *Moral Philoſopher's* book, nor concern himſelf with the particular objections he had brought againſt the Jewiſh and Chriſtian revelation, but applies himſelf to conſider the main principles of his ſcheme, and on which the whole ſtructure depends.

He begins with his fundamental principle, viz. "that moral truth, reaſon, and the fitneſs of things, are the ſole certain mark or criterion of any doctrine as coming from God." He ſhews the ambiguity of the phraſe, and the various ſenſes it is capable of, and that in no ſenſe can it be underſtood to be a proper mark or criterion of any doctrine or law, as having come from God in a way of extraordinary revelation, concerning which alone the queſtion lieth. That therefore we muſt have ſome other mark or criterion, which may evidence an extraordinary interpoſition of God, and his teſtimony to the truth of what is delivered in his name. And particularly he ſetteth himſelf to prove, that miracles and prophecy are evidences of an extraordinary divine interpoſition and teſtimony. He treats the queſtion about miracles, largely and diſtinctly; and, after having ſtated the true notion of a miracle, ſhews, that miracles may be of ſuch a nature, and ſo circumſtanced, as in ſome caſes to prove the divine miſſion of the perſons by whom they are wrought, and the truth and divine authority of the doctrines which are atteſted by them, independently of all conſideration of the doctrines themſelves; but that when they are all conſidered in conjunction with the good tendency of the doctrines and laws that are thus atteſted, they inconteſtably demonſtrate the divine original of thoſe doctrines and laws. He hath good obſervations on the great uſe of miracles, as the plaineſt and moſt popular, the moſt ſhort and compendious way of proving a divine revelation, and judiciouſly obviates the objections made againſt the proof from miracles, both by the *Moral Philoſopher*, and by others that have written on the ſame argument before him. He alſo vindicates the argument from prophecy againſt this writer's exceptions.

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Having ſhewn what are the true proofs of original revelation, he proceeds to conſider *traditional revelation*, concerning which the *Moral Philoſopher*, after many others, had raiſed a great clamour, under pretence that there can be no ſuch thing as divine faith upon fallible human teſtimony. This, Dr. Chapman hath examined very fully, and hath clearly ſhewn, that the original revelation itſelf, together with the accounts of the proofs or extraordinary facts whereby it was at firſt atteſted, may be tranſmitted to after-ages, with ſuch a degree of evidence, as may make it reaſonable for thoſe to whom it is thus tranſmitted to receive it as divine, or as having originally come from God, and conſequently may lay a juſt foundation for their receiving it with a divine faith. He afterwards applieth what he had ſaid concerning the original proofs of revelation, and concerning that revelation's being ſafely tranſmitted to after-ages, to the revelation which was publiſhed by our Lord Jeſus Chriſt, and his apoſtles. He ſheweth at large, that the miracles which were wrought were of ſuch a kind, as were ſufficient alone to prove to eye-witneſſes his and their divine miſſion, and, when farther conſidered in conjunction with the doctrines taught by him and them, amounted to a full demonſtration of it. He then proceeds to ſhew, that theſe miracles, together with particular accounts of our Lord's doctrines, and thoſe of his apoſtles, were faithfully recorded, and committed to writing by thoſe who were witneſſes to them; and that theſe writings have been tranſmitted with unqueſtionable evidence of their being genuine and uncorrupted in all material points: and that therefore we cannot refuſe to receive them, but upon principles which would abſolutely deſtroy the credit of all paſt facts whatſoever.

He next proceeds to conſider and explain the nature of the Chriſtian religion as diſtinguiſhed from deiſm, which the *Moral Philoſopher* and others would confound. He anſwers the objections thoſe writers had urged from the pretended ambiguity and obſcurity of ſcripture, and the differences among Chriſtians about the interpretation of the Chriſtian doctrines; and concludes with a vindication of that great article of the Chriſtian faith, which this writer had endeavoured to pervert and expoſe; concerning our Lord Jeſus Chriſt, as the true Meſſiah foretold by the prophets. The prophecies relating to the Meſſiah are conſidered;

conſidered; and from thence it is evinced, that he was not to be merely a national Prince, and deliverer of the Jews, but the Saviour of the world; and was not merely to erect a temporal dominion, but a ſpiritual kingdom of truth and righteouſneſs.

There was another anſwer publiſhed about the ſame time, *viz. The divine Authority of the Old and New Teſtament aſſerted*, &c. *againſt the unjuſt Aſperſions and falſe Reaſonings of a Book, intitled "The Moral Philoſopher,"* London, 8vo. 1739. After what was ſaid on a like occaſion in my laſt letter, I ſhall make no apology for giving ſome account of this anſwer; which is the rather neceſſary, becauſe the *Moral Philoſopher*, in the ſecond volume he publiſhed, and of which ſome notice muſt be taken afterwards, bent his force principally againſt it. The deſign of this anſwer was to take a diſtinct view of what Dr. Morgan had offered both againſt revelation in general, and againſt the holy Scriptures in particular: and it coſt ſome pains to range the objections of that writer in ſome order, which are ſcattered with a ſtrange confuſion through his book. This anſwer begins with ſtating the queſtion concerning revelation in general, the uſefulneſs of which the *Moral Philoſopher* makes a ſhew of acknowledging, and yet in effect leaveth no way of knowing when ſuch a revelation is really given. His pretended ſole criterion of moral truth and fitneſs is examined; and it is ſhewn, that miracles may be ſo circumſtanced for number, nature, and continuance, as to yield a ſufficient atteſtation to the divine miſſion of the perſons by whom, and to the divine authority of the doctrines and laws in confirmation of which they are wrought: and that the account of theſe extraordinary miraculous facts, as well as the laws and doctrines atteſted and confirmed by them, may be tranſmitted to us in ſuch a manner, that it would be perfectly unreaſonable to deny or doubt of them.

From the queſtion concerning revelation in general, the author of this anſwer proceeds to what is the principal deſign of his book, *viz.* to vindicate the revelation contained in the holy Scriptures of the Old and New Teſtament. And firſt, the law of Moſes is vindicated at large againſt the objections of the *Moral Philoſopher*; and the excellent deſign, nature, and tendency of it is diſtinctly ſhewn. Particularly, that law is cleared from the charge of countenancing and encouraging human ſacrifices: and

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as the caſe of Abraham's offering up Iſaac has been often inſiſted upon, and particularly is repreſented by this writer, as abſolutely ſubverſive of the whole law of nature, and a command which it was impoſſible for God to give, or for us to have any proof that it was given, care is taken to ſet this whole matter in a proper light, and to anſwer the objections that have been made againſt it. The ſame is done with regard to the war againſt the Benjamites in the affair of Gibeah, of which our author had made a moſt odious repreſentation, with a view to caſt a reflection on the oracle of Urim and Thummim. The prophet Samuel and David are cleared from the unjuſt aſperſions he had caſt upon them: and the ſcandalous repreſentation he had made of the latter's dancing naked before the ark; as alſo what Lord Shafteſbury had offered on the ſame ſubject, and concerning the *naked ſoltant ſpirit of prophecy*, are conſidered, and the injuſtice and abſurdity of it ſhewn. The characters of the ancient prophets are vindicated; and the author's groſs falſifications, and ſtrange perverſions of the Scripture-hiſtory expoſed. With regard to the objections brought by the *Moral Philoſopher* againſt the New Teſtament, particular notice is taken of his baſe inſinuations againſt the character of our bleſſed Saviour, and eſpecially of his pretence, that Jeſus at his death renounced his being the Meſſiah foretold by the prophets. It is ſhewn, that he claimed to be the Meſſiah, and that he was really ſo in the true ſenſe of their prophetical writings. As to the apoſtles, it is proved, in oppoſition to what he had confidently aſſerted to the contrary, both that they themſelves profeſſed to be under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and that they gave ſufficient proofs to convince the world of their divine miſſion. The atteſtation given to them by the extraordinary gifts of the Holy Ghoſt is particularly conſidered; and the author's pretence, that the falſe teachers, as well as the true, had thoſe extraordinary gifts and powers, and made uſe of them in confirmation of their falſe doctrines, is examined, and ſhewn to be vain and groundleſs. The account he giveth of the Jewiſh Goſpel, which he pretends was preached by all the apoſtles but St. Paul, is ſhewn to be entirely his own fiction; and the harmony between St. Paul and the other apoſtles, and the wiſdom and conſiſtency of their conduct, are manifeſted. The attempt he maketh againſt the whole canon of the New Teſtament,

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as if it were corrupted and interpolated by the Jews, is conſidered. And whereas, under pretence of rectifying the errors of Chriſtianity with regard to ſome particular doctrines of Chriſtianity, he had ſeverely inveighed againſt the doctrine of Chriſt's ſatisfaction; this is vindicated againſt his exceptions. Finally, the argument he would draw from the differences among Chriſtians, to prove that none of the doctrines of revealed religion are of any certainty or uſe to mankind, is ſhewn to be vain and inconcluſive.

The author of the *Moral Philoſopher*, who was a writer of great vivacity, did not continue long ſilent. He publiſhed a defence of his former book, in what he called *The ſecond volume of the Moral Philoſopher; or, a farther Vindication of Moral Truth and Reaſon.* This was chiefly deſigned againſt the author of the anſwer laſt mentioned, except a long letter addreſſed to Euſebius, *i. e.* Dr. Chapman. In this book, he talks with the ſame confuſion that he did before, concerning moral truth and reaſon, as being the ſole criterion of divine truth, or truth as coming from God; without adding any new proof, or diſtinctly explaining what he means by it. He repreſents his adverſaries, and all the advocates for revelation, as *renouncing all evidence from nature and reaſon in matters of religion;* and that, in their ſcheme, natural and revealed religion are two *eſſentially different and oppoſite religions.* This is a very unfair repreſentation: ſince he could not but know, that they maintain, that there is a harmony and connection between reaſon and revelation; and that revelation leaves all the proofs of religion drawn from reaſon in their full force, and adds to them the atteſtation of a divine authority or teſtimony. And this muſt certainly be of great weight. It gives a farther degree of certainty and evidence, even with regard to thoſe things, of which we might have ſome diſcovery by our reaſon before, as well as furniſheth a ſufficient ground of aſſent with regard to things, which we could not have known by mere unaſſiſted reaſon.

As to the proofs of revelation, he ſtill inſiſteth upon it, that miracles are no proofs: but he takes very little notice of what his anſwerers, and particularly Dr. Chapman, who had treated his queſtion largely and diſtinctly, had offered to prove that they are ſo. He lays down ſeveral obſervations tending to ſhew the great

great difficulty there is in knowing which are true miracles. To this purpoſe he obſerves, that men may eaſily be miſtaken, and think thoſe things to be miracles which are not ſo; or they may be impoſed upon by artifice, or the ſtrength of their own imaginations, ſo as to take thoſe things to have been done, which really were not done: That perſons are much more liable to be deceived, and often have been ſo, in judging of things ſuppoſed to be ſupernatural, than in things that come in the common courſe: and that if even thoſe before whom they are ſuppoſed to have been originally wrought may be thus deceived, much more thoſe to whom they come only by report. All that follows from theſe, and other obſervations to the ſame purpoſe, amounts really to no more than this, that great and particular care and caution is neceſſary to guard againſt deception in things of ſo extraordinary a nature. But it is far from proving, either that it is impoſſible that any true miracles ſhould ever be done, or that we ſhould have any ſatisfactory evidence or certainty concerning them. Notwithſtanding all that this writer hath offered, it is ſtill true, that miracles may be ſo circumſtanced with regard to their number, nature, and continuance, that perſons may be as certain of their having been really done, as they can be of any facts whatſoever for which they have the teſtimony of all their ſenſes; and may be alſo certain, that they are things abſolutely exceeding all human power. They may alſo be of ſuch a nature and tendency, and ſo manifeſtly deſigned to promote the cauſe of righteouſneſs and virtue, that we may be ſure they were not done by any evil being ſuperior to man; and muſt therefore have been done either by the immediate power of God himſelf, or by ſuperior good beings acting under his direction. It hath been often ſhewn, that ſuch were the miracles wrought at the firſt eſtabliſhment of the Jewiſh and Chriſtian diſpenſation. They were done in ſo open a manner, and produced ſuch effects, that thoſe before whom they were wrought had as full an aſſurance of the reality of them, as they could have of any facts whatſoever; and at the ſame time could not be but ſenſible that they exceeded all the power of man. And they were alſo of ſuch a nature, that they could not without the higheſt abſurdity be ſuppoſed to have been wrought by any evil being or beings; and therefore ought to be regarded as the teſtimony of God to the divine miſſion of

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the perſons by whom, and to the truth and divine original and authority of the doctrines and laws in confirmation of which they were wrought.

Our author indeed hath in this book made an extraordinary attempt, with regard to the miracles of Moſes, to prove, that though that vaſt aſſembly of people were made to believe that thoſe things were done before their eyes, and that they themſelves ſaw them done, yet they were never really done at all; and in order to account for this, he makes ſome of the wildeſt ſuppoſitions that ever entered into the head of any man that was not abſolutely out of his ſenſes. But leſt this ſhould not take, his next attempt is to prove, that thoſe miracles, if wrought at at all, were done by an evil power: as if any evil being, even ſuppoſing, what is abſurd to imagine, that he were capable of exerting ſuch amazing acts of divine power as were exhibited at the eſtabliſhment of the Moſaic diſpenſation, would do it, to confirm a ſyſtem of laws, which preſcribed the adoration of the one living and true God, in oppoſition to the then ſpreading idolatry, and ſtrongly obliged men to the practice of virtue and righteouſneſs. The chief proof he bringeth for ſo ſtrange an aſſertion is, the command relating to the deſtruction of the Canaanites, on account not only of their impure and cruel idolatries, but of the moſt abominable crimes and vices, which then univerſally prevailed among them; as if it were impoſſible for God, in any circumſtances of things, ever to give ſuch a command. This, which hath been frequently urged by the writers on that ſide, particularly Dr. Tindal, was conſidered in the *Anſwer to Chriſtianity as old as the Creation*, vol. ii. p. 352—358, 2d edit. And upon its being here repeated by the *Moral Philoſopher*, was again examined and obviated in the 2d volume of *The Divine Authority of the Old and New Teſtament aſſerted*, p. 97, &c. It is alſo ſet in a proper light by Mr. Lowman, in his *Diſſertation on the Civil Government of the Hebrews*, p. 220, &c.

As to our Saviour's miracles, this writer pretendeth, contrary to Chriſt's own moſt expreſs declarations, that he did not appeal to them as proofs of his divine miſſion. He alſo repeateth the ſtale objection, which hath been often anſwered and expoſed, that the miraculous cures which Jeſus wrought were owing to the ſtrength of fancy and imagination in the patient, and not to power

power in the agent. But, whatever we ſuppoſe the force of imagination in ſome caſes to be, there are many of our Lord's miracles of ſuch a kind, that there cannot poſſibly be the leaſt room or pretence for ſuch a ſuppoſition.

With regard to the conveyance of divine revelation, it had been ſhewn, that doctrines and laws which were originally received by revelation from God, together with an account of the extraordinary facts or proofs whereby that revelation was atteſted, may be tranſmitted to after-ages in a manner that may be ſafely depended upon; and that the doctrines and facts of the Chriſtian revelation have been ſo tranſmitted. He hath little to oppoſe to the clear and diſtinct proofs that were brought for this, but ſome general clamours, which he repeateth on all occaſions, about the uncertainty of tradition and fallibility of human teſtimony; though it be inconteſtably evident, that laws and facts may be, and often have been, tranſmitted in this way, with ſuch a degree of evidence and certainty, that it would be perfectly unreaſonable, and contrary to common ſenſe, to deny or doubt of them: and yet all along throughout his whole book, he argues as if it were ſufficient to deſtroy the authority of the ſcripture-revelation, that its doctrines and laws, and the account of its important facts, have been tranſmitted through the hands of weak and fallible men. This he repreſenteth as a placing the moſt important divine truth on the foot of fallible human teſtimony. But however ſpecious this may appear, and fitted to impoſe upon ſuperficial inquirers, there is nothing in it of real weight: for if a revelation or law had any original divine authority, and, that it might be of uſe to ſucceeding ages, was committed to writing, which is the ſureſt method of conveyance; and if we have ſufficient evidence to give us reaſonable aſſurance, that this written revelation has been ſafely tranſmitted to us, without any material corruption or alteration, as hath been often plainly ſhewn with regard to the Chriſtian revelation; then it is as really of divine authority now as it was at firſt, and we are obliged to receive and ſubmit to it as ſuch. For it doth not loſe its authority by being committed to writing; nor doth its authority depend on the intermediate conveyers, any more than the authority of a law formerly enacted by the legiſlature can be ſaid to depend upon

the perſons by whom it has been tranſcribed or printed, but upon its having been originally enacted by the legiſlature*.

As to the objections this writer had urged in his former book againſt the revelation contained in the holy ſcriptures of the Old and New Teſtament, and which had been particularly conſidered, he repeats them again in this book with greater confidence than before, and often without taking the leaſt notice of what was offered to the contrary; or if he makes a ſhew of anſwering, very lightly paſſeth over what was of principal importance in the argument. He gives himſelf little trouble about the groſs miſrepreſentations and falſifications of the ſacred hiſtory which had been plainly proved upon him, but ſtill perſiſteth in the charges he had advanced, and addeth farther invectives; at the ſame time aſſuring his reader, that his anſwerer *had not ſaid one word to the purpoſe*, and that what he had offered was *one continued rant*. And ſometimes, as in the caſe of the Meſſiah's being, according to the prophetical writings, a mere temporal prince of the Jews only, our author, inſtead of anſwering the proofs which had been brought to the contrary, declares it to be a point ſo evident, that he *ſcorns to diſpute with any man that will deny it*, *i. e.* he ſcorns to diſpute with any man that will not give him up the very point in queſtion.

Theſe are arts of controverſy which none would envy him the honour of. And he frequently expreſſeth himſelf in a manner that ſhews little regard to common decency: as when he ſaith of David, *Away with him to the devil from whence he came!* And ſpeaking of the Jews, he avers, that this *miraculouſly ſtupid people was always inſpired and poſſeſſed with the ſpirit of the devil*. And the Chriſtians come in for their ſhare of the compliment; for he adds, that *they*, *i. e.* the Jews, have *tranſfuſed their ſpirit and faith into Chriſtians*.

It would not be worth while to mention theſe things, if it were not to give ſome idea of the temper and genius of this writer. He has gone ſo far as boldly to pronounce, that the God of Iſrael, to whom the prieſthood was *inſtituted*, and *ſacrifices* were *offered*, was a *cheat* and an *idol*, as much ſo as any of the Pagan

* See concerning this, "Divine Authority of the Old and New Teſtament aſſerted," vol. ii. p. 24, 25.

deities,

deities, and that he was only conſidered as a local tutelar deity; though one would think it ſcarce poſſible for any man ſeriouſly to read the Old Teſtament, and not be ſenſible that the God there every-where recommended to our adoration and obedience, and whom the people of Iſrael were obliged by their law to worſhip, excluſively of all idol deities, is repreſented as the maker of heaven and earth, the ſovereign Lord of the univerſe. In his former book, he had ſometimes ſpoken with great ſeeming reſpect of Chriſtianity; but here he throws off all diſguiſe, and does what he can to expoſe it to the deriſion and contempt of mankind. Nothing can be more ſcandalous than the repreſentation he makes of the effuſion of the Holy Ghoſt on the day of Pentecoſt. He avers, that thoſe who had the gift of tongues could not ſpeak thoſe languages with any ſenſe, coherence, or conſiſtency; that they only uttered a ſtrange kind of gibberiſh, which neither they themſelves nor any body elſe could underſtand. And yet it appears from the account that is given us, that the people of many different countries, which were come from all parts to Jeruſalem at the feaſt of Pentecoſt, underſtood the apoſtles, as ſpeaking to them in their ſeveral languages the *great things of God*, and were filled with ſuch admiration on this account as produced the converſion of great numbers of them to the Chriſtian faith. He pronounces, that they who ſeemed to have theſe gifts *were out of their wits for the time*, and expreſsly calls them *frantic fits;* and what is very extraordinary, pretends to prove all this from the authority of St. Paul himſelf, who, according to his repreſentation, muſt have been one of the maddeſt enthuſiaſts that ever lived; though at other times he thinks fit to extol him as *the bold and brave defender of religion and liberty.*

He concludes his book with a freſh invective againſt the law of Moſes, as if it were deſigned to indulge men in perſonal intemperance, and were wholly calculated for the intereſt of his own family; though no lawgiver ever gave greater proofs of his diſintereſtedneſs than Moſes did; as he made no proviſion for raiſing his own children to honours and dignities in the ſtate, but left them to continue in the rank of common Levites. The laſt thing he mentions is the law about the trial of jealouſy, of which he gives a ſtrange account. But this, as was clearly proved againſt him, dependeth wholly upon his own falſe and arbitary

ſuppoſitions, which betray either great ignorance or wilful miſ-repreſentation*.

It could not be a very agreeable employment to carry on a controverſy with ſuch a writer. There is however a ſecond volume publiſhed of the *Divine Authority of the Old and New Teſtament aſſerted*, by the author of the firſt, which was deſigned as an anſwer to the ſecond volume of the *Moral Philoſopher*, London, 8vo, 1740. In this reply, every thing in his book is conſidered that had any appearance of reaſon and argument; and his unfair repreſentations, his unjuſt aſperſions, and confident attempts to impoſe falſehoods upon his reader, are detected and expoſed. And whereas there is no part of his book that ſeems to have been more laboured, than where he undertakes to prove, that the tribe of Levi had above twenty ſhillings in the pound upon all the lands of Iſrael, the extravagance of his computations is plainly ſhewn. But no man hath ſet this matter in a clearer light, than Mr. Lowman, in his learned and judicious *Diſſertation on the Civil Government of the Hebrews; in which the Juſtice, Wiſdom, and Goodneſs of the Moſaical Conſtitution are vindicated; in particular from ſome late unfair and falſe Repreſentations of them in the "Moral Philoſopher,"* London, 8vo, 1740.

But this author was not to be convinced or ſilenced. He ſoon after publiſhed what he called the *Third Volume of the Moral Philoſopher; or, Superſtition and Tyranny inconſiſtent with Theocracy*, London, 8vo, 1740. In the body of this book, which is particularly deſigned as an anſwer to the ſecond volume of the *Divine Authority of the Old and New Teſtament aſſerted*, there is ſcarce any thing new attempted. The ſame things are repeated over again, in a ſtrain of confidence peculiar to this writer; and at this rate it is eaſy to write books and carry on controverſies without end. But there ſcarce needs any other confutation of what he hath here offered, than to deſire the reader carefully to compare it with the book to which it is pretended to be an anſwer. The only farther obſervation I would make upon it is, that our author, contrary to his uſual cuſtom, has in one inſtance condeſcended to acknowledge a miſtake he had been guilty of in

* See "Divine Authority of the Old and New Teſtament aſſerted," vol. ii. p. 362, & ſeq.

his

his former volume. It is in his computation of the Levitical revenues, in which he had made an overcharge in one ſingle article of no leſs than one million two hundred thouſand pounds a year. Yet ſo fond is he of what he had advanced concerning the Levites having, by the Moſaical conſtitution, the whole wealth and power of the nation in their hands, that he ſtill endeavours to ſupport it by ſome very extraordinary calculations; the falſity and abſurdity of which was ſoon after clearly and fully expoſed by Mr. Lowman, in an appendix to his *Diſſertation on the Civil Government of the Hebrews*, London, 1741. But the moſt remarkable thing in the third volume of the *Moral Philoſopher*, and that part of it which may be moſt properly called new, is a long introduction, of above an hundred pages, in which he pretends to give an account of the ancient patriarchal religion, and an hiſtorical relation of the deſcent of the Hebrew ſhepherds into Egypt; the riſe and foundation of the Moſaic theocracy; the inconſiſtencies and ſelf-contradictions of the Hebrew hiſtorians, &c.. In this part of his work he hath, if poſſible, exceeded himſelf in miſrepreſentation and abuſe: but I ſhall take no farther notice of it than to obſerve, that there were ſolid and ingenious remarks made upon it, by a gentleman that ſtiles himſelf "Theophanes Cantabrigienſis," in a pamphlet intitled, *The ancient Hiſtory of the Hebrews vindicated*, Cambridge, 8vo, 1741. And afterwards by Dr. Samuel Chandler, in his *Vindication of the Hiſtory of the Old Teſtament, in anſwer to the Miſrepreſentations and Calumnies of Thomas Morgan, M. D. and Moral Philoſopher:* the firſt part of which was publiſhed, London, 1741, and a ſecond part came out in 1743, and after Dr. Morgan's death. It is here plainly proved, that this writer hath been guilty of manifeſt falſehoods, and of the moſt groſs perverſions of the ſcripture-hiſtory, even in thoſe very inſtances in which he aſſureth his reader, he hath kept cloſe to the accounts given by the Hebrew hiſtorians. The author of the *Reſurrection of Jeſus conſidered*, who wrote ſoon after, thought fit to make a very contemptuous repreſentation of Dr. Chandler's performance. He is pleaſed to repreſent him, as having levelled all his artillery of wit, learning, and ſpleen againſt the *Moral Philoſopher*, Dr. Morgan, inſtead of anſwering; and as having fired off twenty ſheets to ſhoot one of his, and miſſed the mark *.

* Reſurrection of Jeſus conſidered, p. 71, 72. edit. 3d.

This no doubt muſt paſs for a full confutation of Dr. Chandler's work. But all that can be gathered from it is, that, with theſe gentlemen, the proving of any of them guilty of the moſt groſs falſifications of ſcripture, which had been fully proved upon Dr. Morgan, is to paſs for a thing of no conſequence; as if falſehood and miſrepreſentation were to be looked upon as very allowable, when put in practice for ſo good an end as the expoſing Chriſtianity and the holy ſcripture. It is proper here to obſerve, that the ingenious Mr. Hallet, who, as was mentioned before, had early appeared againſt the firſt volume of the *Moral Philoſopher*, publiſhed alſo *A Rebuke to the Moral Philoſopher for the Errors and Immoralities contained in his third Volume*, 8vo, 1740.

I ſhall conclude this account of the *Moral Philoſopher* with obſerving, that ſoon after his third volume appeared, Dr. Chapman publiſhed a ſecond volume of his *Euſebius, or the true Chriſtian's farther Defence againſt the Principles and Reaſonings of the Moral Philoſopher*, London, 8vo, 1741. In this he conſiders at large all that this writer had offered concerning what he calls the Jewiſh goſpel, which he confidently affirms was preached by all the apoſtles but St. Paul, and of which he pretends the temporal kingdom of Chriſt in the Jewiſh ſenſe was the principal article. He ſhews, with the cleareſt evidence, that this was not preached by any of the apoſtles, and that there was a perfect harmony between them and St. Paul, as to what concerned the authority and obligation of the Jewiſh law under the goſpel. He alſo judiciouſly explains and vindicates the ſcripture-doctrine of redemption, and the ſatisfaction of Chriſt, againſt that author's objections and groſs miſrepreſentations.

The following this extraordinary writer through his ſeveral books, and the anſwers that were made to him, has engaged me in a detail which I am afraid has not proved very agreeable to you, any more than it has been ſo to myſelf. But it may be of ſome uſe to ſhew, that, notwithſtanding his boaſted pretences, there have been few writers who have been more effectually confuted and expoſed, than he that was pleaſed to honour himſelf with the title of the *Moral Philoſopher*.

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LETTER XI.

Obſervations upon the pernicious Tendency of the Pamphlet intitled Chriſtianity not founded on Argument—*The Deſign of it is to ſhew, that the Chriſtian Faith has nothing to ſupport it but a ſenſeleſs Enthuſiaſm—The Author's great Diſingenuity and Miſrepreſentations of Scripture detected—He ſtrikes at natural Religion, as well as revealed, deſtroys all Certainty of Reaſon, and declares againſt Education, and the inſtructing Children in any Principles at all—The principal Arguments he hath offered in Support of his Scheme conſidered—Chriſtianity no Enemy to Examination and Inquiry—Men's being commanded to believe, no Preſumption that Faith is not a reaſonable Aſſent—The Faith required in the Goſpel is properly a Virtue, and the Unbelief there condemned is really a Vice—His Pretence, that the People are not capable of diſcerning the Force of the Proofs brought for Chriſtianity, and therefore cannot be obliged to believe it, examined—Account of the Anſwers publiſhed againſt him.*

SIR,

THE controverſy with the *Moral Philoſopher* was ſcarce at an end, when a new and very remarkable pamphlet appeared, intitled, *Chriſtianity not founded on Argument*, London, 1742. The author of this carried on his deſign againſt the Chriſtian religion, in a way ſomewhat different from what others had done before him. Under ſpecious appearances of zeal for religion, and under the cover of devout expreſſions, he hath endeavoured to ſhew, that the Chriſtian faith hath no foundation in reaſon, nor hath any thing to ſupport it but a wild and ſenſeleſs enthuſiaſm, deſtitute of all proof and evidence. And if this could be made out, it would no doubt anſwer the intention he too plainly appears to have had in view, the expoſing the Chriſtian religion to the deriſion and contempt of mankind. With great gravity and ſeeming ſeriouſneſs he ſets himſelf to ſhew, that a rational faith, *i. e.* as he explains it, "an aſſent to revealed truth founded "upon the conviction of the underſtanding, is a falſe and un-

" warrantable notion*." That " that perſon beſt enjoys faith " who never aſked himſelf one ſingle queſtion about it, and never " dealt at all in the evidence of reaſon†." That God never intended that we ſhould make uſe of our reaſon, or intellectual faculty at all in believing, or that our faith ſhould be founded upon any evidence which might convince the judgment, or make it reaſonable for us to believe. This he undertakes formally to prove, firſt by ſeveral arguments drawn from the nature of reaſon and religion; and afterwards he endeavoureth to prove the ſame thing from the account given us in ſcripture.

Having thus, as he pretends, removed the falſe grounds of faith and religion, and ſhewn that it hath nothing to do with reaſon or argument, he next proceeds to declare what is the true principle of faith; and this he reſolves wholly into a *conſtant particular revelation, imparted ſeparately and ſupernaturally to every individual*‡: That " the Holy Ghoſt irradiates the ſouls " of believers at once with an irreſiſtible light from heaven, that " flaſhes conviction in a moment; ſo that this faith is completed " in an inſtant, and the moſt perfect and finiſhed creed produced " at once, without any tedious progreſs in deductions of our " own§." He repreſents this great dictator and infallible guide, as having promiſed " to abide with us to the end of the world, " that we might not be left liable one moment to a poſſibility of " error and impoſture‖; and as ſpeaking the ſame thing to all, " and bringing them to think all alike**. Nothing can be more abſurd in itſelf, nothing more contrary to plain undeniable fact, than this immediate infallible inſpiration of every particular perſon, which cauſes *men to think all alike*, and does not leave them liable one moment to a *poſſibility of error and impoſture*; and yet this he makes to be the ſole foundation of the Chriſtian faith. He repreſents it to be of ſuch a nature as to render all outward inſtruction, and even the ſcriptures themſelves, entirely needleſs; and that thoſe who are thus inſtructed by the ſpirit, " need not " concern themſelves about the credit of ancient miracles, or " the genuineneſs of diſtant records:" as if the Chriſtian faith had nothing to do with the facts recorded in the goſpels. This

* Chriſtianity not founded on Argument, p. 7. † Ibid. p. 29.
‡ Ibid. p. 112. § Ibid. p. 89. ‖ Ibid. p. 60. ** Ibid. p. 89.

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he calls the *revealed and ſcriptural account of the matter* *; and pretends, that "this account depends not upon the ſtrength of "any ſingle quotation whatever, but on the joint tendency and "tenor of the whole †."

This pamphlet was received by the enemies of Chriſtianity with great applauſe; and yet, upon a cloſe examination, there are ſuch apparent marks of great diſingenuity in it, as ſhould tend, with fair and candid minds, to give very diſadvantageous impreſſions both of the author, and of a cauſe that needs ſuch baſe arts to ſupport it.

The whole turn of the pamphlet is in a religious ſtrain: he formally pretends to offer up his moſt ardent prayers in behalf of his friend at the throne of grace, "that God would be pleaſed "himſelf to illuminate and irradiate his mind with a perfect and "thorough conviction of the truth of his holy goſpel; that the "ſame Holy Spirit that firſt dictated the divine law would power-"fully ſet on his ſeal, and atteſt its authority in his heart ‡." Such a ſtrain of ridicule as this, for whoſoever impartially conſiders this treatiſe can regard it in no other view, is one of the moſt ſolemn mockeries that were ever offered to the Supreme Being. In many other paſſages, under pretence of exalting the influence of the Holy Spirit, the ſcriptures are depreciated, as of no uſe: They are called, by way of contempt, *manuſcript authorities*, and *paper revelations*; as if the being committed to writing could deſtroy the authority of a divine law; when the man would be thought out of his ſenſes that ſhould, under the ſame pretence, attempt to invalidate the authority of human laws. It is obſervable, that the moſt highflown enthuſiaſts have always ſpoken with diſregard of the holy ſcripture, and repreſented it as a *dead letter*; which by the way is no great ſign of its being of an enthuſiaſtic nature and tendency: and this writer hath endeavoured to take advantage of their madneſs for expoſing the authority of the ſacred writings. Thus the deiſts can upon occaſion run into the wilds of enthuſiaſm, and join with the men they moſt heartily deſpiſe, in order to anſwer their deſign of expoſing Chriſtianity. Such hath been the fate of holy writ, to be

* Chriſtianity not founded on Argument, p. 68.

† Ibid. p. 105. ‡ Ibid. p. 112.

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undervalued by thoſe that had no religion at all, and by thoſe that have carried religion up to madneſs and phrenzy.

But what greatly ſtrengthens the charge of diſingenuity againſt this writer is, that he is guilty of the moſt groſs miſrepreſentations of ſcripture, and the matters of fact therein contained: ſome of which are of ſuch a kind as to be ſcarce reconcileable to any degree of honeſty and candour. He pretends to prove, from the plain narrative part of the New Teſtament hiſtory, that Chriſt and his apoſtles, in planting the goſpel, never propoſed arguments or evidences of any kind to engage men to believe: whereas it is manifeſt, from the accounts given in the *goſpels*, the *acts*, and the *epiſtles*, that the method Chriſt and his apoſtles took to make converts was, by aſſiduous inſtruction, by teaching and preaching, and by laying before them evidences of the moſt convincing kind, and which made it reaſonable for them to believe.

There can ſcarce be a more glaring inſtance of diſingenuity than to aſſert, as this writer does, contrary to Chriſt's own moſt expreſs declarations (concerning which, ſee John v. 36. x. 25. 38. xiv. 11. Matth. xi. 3, 4, 5, 6.), that he himſelf never deſigned, that his miracles ſhould be regarded as proofs and evidences of his divine miſſion; that he was *always remarkably upon the reſerve when he happened among unbelieving company:* and that he took particular care that his miracles ſhould not come to public notice, and *See thou tell no man* was generally the charge: though it is manifeſt from the whole goſpel, that he generally wrought his miracles in the moſt public way, before great numbers of people, and in the preſence even of his moſt malicious adverſaries; and there were only a very few inſtances in which he ſeemed to be upon the reſerve, for which no doubt there were good reaſons, ſome of which may be gathered from the circumſtances of the caſes mentioned. But ſuch is the manner of this writer; if he can find a particular inſtance or two that ſeems favourable to his intention, he lays hold of this, contrary to the whole tenor of the goſpel-hiſtory, and would put it upon his reader, as if what was done for ſpecial reaſons in a very few inſtances, were conſtantly and always the caſe in every inſtance. Thus he poſitively aſſerts, that our Saviour "conſtantly ſtipulated before-hand, for a certain degree, and no ordinary one, "of confidence and perſuaſion in the perſons on whom he wrought "his

"his miracles*." This he ſeems to lay a particular ſtreſs upon; and yet it is ſo far from being true that this was *conſtantly* the caſe, that there are comparatively but a very few inſtances in which he previouſly required perſons to profeſs their belief in him. In one of the anſwers to this pamphlet, there are near fifty inſtances produced of miracles wrought by our Saviour where no ſuch thing was required†. And in the few inſtances where it was inſiſted upon, it was not a commanding thoſe to believe in an inſtant who did not believe before: it was only a requiring them to profeſs the faith they already had, and a declaring his approbation of their faith, and was deſigned as a means to ſtrengthen it more and more. And the propriety of his taking this method in ſome inſtances is manifeſt, as it tended to direct men's views to that which was the principal uſe and end of his miracles, and which our author hath thought fit to deny, *viz.* to confirm their faith in his divine miſſion.

With the ſame unfairneſs he confidently avers, that, according to the ſcripture accounts, the apoſtles always expected to make their converts by a word's ſpeaking; that they never allowed any time for deliberation, but denounced damnation againſt thoſe that heſitated in the leaſt; and that they diſcouraged all examination and inquiry: when on the contrary it appeareth, that they often ſtaid a conſiderable time together in a place, reaſoning in the ſynagogues, repeating their excellent inſtructions, and performing the moſt illuſtrious miracles, as proofs of their divine miſſion. Thus St. Paul abode for a long time at Iconium, for a year and ſix months at Corinth, and for above two years at Epheſus. It is alſo evident that they encouraged men to examination and inquiry, and commended them when they did ſo: a remarkable inſtance of which we have in the encomium beſtowed upon the Bereans, who examined the apoſtles' doctrine, and *ſearched the ſcriptures daily, whether theſe things were ſo*, as they had taught them: and the conſequence of this their diligent examination was, that *many of them believed*, Acts xvii. 10, 11, 12.

The repreſentation this author makes of the influence of the Holy Spirit imparted to all believers is alſo highly diſingenuous,

* Chriſtianity not founded on Argument, p. 49.

† Benſon's Reaſonableneſs of the Chriſt. Relig. &c. p. 181—188.

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though in it he pretends to keep close to the scripture accounts. He represents it as absolutely excluding all outward teaching, and all use of our own endeavours: and yet nothing can be more evident than it is from the whole gospel, that we are required to be diligent in the use of our own endeavours; and the great usefulness of outward teaching is constantly supposed, and provision is made for its continuance in the Christian church. With the like candour he pretendeth, that, according to the scripture account, faith is perfected in an instant, and admitteth of no degrees; and that the Spirit causeth all believers to *think all alike*, and raiseth them above all *possibility of error:* whereas it is evident, that faith is there represented as not ordinarily completed at once, but capable of continual growth and improvement, and as admitting of various degrees. And it is everywhere supposed, that believers may in many things be of different sentiments, and are to bear with one another in their differences.

These, and other things of the like kind, are so palpably misrepresented, that it can hardly be supposed that this writer himself, who is quick-sighted enough when he pleases, should not have been sensible that they were so.

Another thing that may give us no very advantageous notion of the author's design is, that he hath advanced several things which seem to have a bad aspect on natural religion as well as revealed, and representeth the former as not founded on reason and argument any more than the latter. He pretends, that all attempts to prove the principles of natural religion by reason hath done more harm than good; and that "even upon the plainest "question in nature, the existence of a Deity, the laboured pro-"ductions of Dr. Clarke himself have rather contributed to make "for the other side of the question, and raised a thousand new "doubts in the reader's mind*. Accordingly he takes a great deal of pains to destroy all certainty of reason. He represents it as perpetually fluctuating, and never capable of coming to a certainty about any thing; and as if truth and falsehood may be equally proved by it. The bulk of mankind are, according to him, under a natural incapacity of acting at all: and as to *the ablest and best of men*, "they are equally disqualified for fair reasoning

* Christianity not founded on Argument, p. 81.

"by

"by their natural prejudices; which, being ever earlier than the "firſt efforts of reaſon, is as abſolute a diſqualification for ſuch "a trial, as the greateſt natural incapacity*."

But ſurely all who have any regard to religion, or who think that reaſon is an advantage or privilege, and that men are to be regarded as rational thinking beings, moral agents, muſt look upon this way of repreſenting things as abſolutely ſubverſive of all religion and morality. It tendeth to debaſe and vilify human nature, and to caſt diſhonour upon God's government and providence; as if he had taken no care of mankind at all, but gave them up entirely to their paſſions, without any principle of reaſon to guide or govern them; or at leaſt had placed them in ſuch circumſtances, that, as this writer declares, reaſon always *comes too late with its aſſiſtance*, and not till we *are loſt in the power of evil habits beyond recovery*.

To all this it may be added, that there are ſeveral paſſages in his book, in which he abſolutely declares againſt inſtructing children in religious or moral principles, as a wicked attempt to prepoſſeſs their tender minds, and as barring all farther improvement. No care is to be taken to cultivate the minds of young perſons, under pretence that this would only tend to fill them with prejudices. Thus there is no advantage at all in being born in an enlightened or civilized age or nation; and a child in Great Britain muſt be left as much without inſtruction, as if he were born in the wilds of America. To make this ſcheme of a piece, and perfectly conſiſtent, it ſhould be ſo contrived, that children ſhould not be trained up to any language at all, and that they ſhould be kept from all converſe with others, for fear of their being prepoſſeſſed; and that they ſhould be left wholly to nature, without inſtruction of any kind. And what a hopeful ſtate of things this would introduce, is eaſy to ſee. Thus, to avoid Chriſtianity, theſe gentlemen ſeem willing to ſink us into the loweſt degree of barbariſm and brutality.

Having made theſe general obſervations on the ſpirit and deſign of this applauded performance, and the pernicious tendency of it to ſubvert all certainty of reaſon, and natural religion as well as revealed, I ſhall now take ſome notice of the principal

* Chriſtianity not founded on Argument, p. 17, 18. 23. 26.

things

things he hath offered in ſupport of his ſcheme, and to ſhew that Chriſtianity hath no foundation in reaſon.

One of his arguments bears a near affinity to what has been juſt mentioned concerning education: for he produceth it as a proof, that the chriſtian religion is not a rational one, becauſe we are baptized into it, and obliged to train up children in the knowledge and belief of it. A ſtrange argument this! ſince common ſenſe tells us, that the more rational and excellent any religion is, the more requiſite it would be to inſtruct children in the principles of it, and to ſet its doctrines and evidences in a proper light before them; as far as they are capable of receiving them: for this would be the beſt preſervative againſt the pernicious influence of corrupt principles, and the power of wrong affections and evil habits, which otherwiſe, by the author's own acknowledgment, would be apt to get the ſtart of them, and give a wrong bias to the mind.

He ſeems to lay a great ſtreſs on the ſudden converſions we ſometimes read of in the New Teſtament: but they are far from being proofs of what he brings them to prove, that thoſe perſons were converted without reaſon and evidence. All that can be fairly concluded from thoſe inſtances is, that the evidence that was offered was ſo ſtrong, and came with ſuch light and force, as did more to produce conviction in a ſhort time, than a long courſe of abſtracted reaſonings would have done. If there were ſome thouſands, as he obſerves, converted at one lecture*, theſe inſtances only relate to the converſions that were wrought at Jeruſalem ſoon after our Lord's reſurrection and aſcenſion, of which the people had ſuch convincing evidences by the extraordinary effuſion of the Holy Ghoſt on the day of Pentecoſt, and the ſignal and undeniable miracles wrought by the diſciples in the name of a riſen Jeſus, as, joined with what they had known before of our Saviour's admirable diſcourſes and illuſtrious miracles, as well as the extraordinary events that had happened at his crucifixion, to which they themſelves had been witneſſes, rendered the evidence ſo ſtrong and ſtriking, that it was perfectly rational to ſubmit to it, and receive it.

The paſſage of the apoſtle, 2 Cor. x. 4, 5. *The weapons of our*

* Chriſtianity not founded on Argument, p. 39.

warfare

warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of ſtrong holds, caſting down imaginations, or *reaſonings, and every high thing that exalteth itſelf againſt the knowledge of God; and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Chriſt*, is produced by this writer to ſhew that the goſpel is not only without all evidence, but contrary to reaſon. And yet the manifeſt deſign of it is to ſhew, not that the goſpel had no evidence to ſupport it, but that the evidences accompanying it were ſo ſtrong and convincing, as were vaſtly ſuperior to any arguments or reaſonings that could be brought againſt it. But there is no injunction there laid upon Chriſtians, as the author pretends, "to lay reaſon under the moſt abſolute reſtraint and "prohibition, and not to permit it the leaſt opportunity or "freedom to exert itſelf, or interpoſe upon any occaſion what-"ſoever *."

Another argument with which he makes a mighty parade is to this purpoſe, that no religion can be rational that is not founded on a free and impartial examination †. And ſuch examination ſuppoſes a perfect neutrality to the principles which are examined, and even a temporal diſbelief of them, which is what the goſpel condemneth. But this proceeds upon a wrong account of the nature of free examination and inquiry. It is not neceſſary to a juſt inquiry into doctrines or facts, that a man ſhould be abſolutely indifferent to them before he begins that inquiry, much leſs that he ſhould actually diſbelieve them; as if he muſt neceſſarily commence atheiſt, before he can fairly examine into the proofs of the exiſtence of God. It is ſufficient to a candid examination, that a man applieth himſelf to it with a mind open to conviction, and a diſpoſition to embrace truth on which ſide ſoever it ſhall appear, and to receive the evidence that ſhall ariſe in the courſe of the trial. And if the inquiry relateth to principles in which we have been inſtructed, then, ſuppoſing thoſe principles to be in themſelves rational and well founded, it may well happen, that, in inquiring into the grounds of them, a fair examination may be carried on without ſeeing cauſe to diſbelieve, or doubt of them through the whole courſe of the enquiry; which in that caſe will end in a fuller conviction of them than before.

* Chriſtianity not founded on Argument, p. 84. † Ibid. p. 5.

But

But there is no argument on which he ſeems to place a greater ſtreſs, to ſhew that Chriſtianity is not founded on reaſon and evidence, than this, that we are there authoritatively commanded to believe, and penalties are denounced againſt us if we do not believe: whereas it is plain, that "no propoſition can be tendered "to our reaſon with penalties annexed, or under the reſtraint "of threats and authority:*" ſince aſſent or diſſent is an "independent event, under no influence of ours." Men are conſtantly determined to believe according to the evidence that appeareth to them, and the will hath nothing to do with it: and therefore there can be no virtue in believing truth, or fault in rejecting it. And he expreſsly affirms, "that a determination "either right or wrong in matters which are not ſelf-evident, "and in which there is any thing of induction or inference, is "equally meritorious†." This is a very convenient plea for infidelity, and ſo it is for atheiſm itſelf: ſince it proceeds upon this foundation, that men can never be obliged to believe any principles at all in which there is any thing of induction or inference, nor conſequently thoſe relating to the exiſtence of God and a providence. And if there be no fault in diſbelieving thoſe principles, there can be no fault in refuſing to obey, or worſhip him, which neceſſarily dependeth upon the belief of his exiſtence. But the foundation this goes upon is manifeſtly falſe; as if men were always, and in all caſes, determined by mere evidence, and that aſſent and diſſent were therefore neceſſary acts, and abſolutely out of their power. Nothing is more undeniable from common obſervation and experience, than that the will and affections have a great influence on the judgment; and that we have a great deal of freedom in the right or wrong uſe of our reaſoning faculties, and conſequently are liable to praiſe or blame on that account. Let the proofs that are offered be ever ſo plain, we may chooſe whether we will attend to them; or we may turn our eyes from the evidence; or, if we profeſs to examine, may, through prepoſſeſſion and wrong diſpoſitions of mind, inſtitute a ſlight, a partial, and defective examination. Men may be, and often are, ſo biaſſed by the influence of affections and intereſts, as to cauſe things to appear to them in a quite different light than

* Chriſtianity not founded on Argument. p. 8. † Ibid. 17, 18.

otherwiſe

otherwiſe they would do. All the world owns, that a candour and ſimplicity of heart, the love of truth, and a readineſs to embrace it when fairly propoſed, is a very commendable diſpoſition of mind; and that refuſing to receive it through the influence of corrupt affections and paſſions is really culpable. But this eſpecially holdeth in truths of a religious and moral nature. Our believing or diſbelieving them is very much influenced by the good or bad diſpoſitions of our minds, and muſt have a great effect upon the practice: and therefore in theſe caſes to receive and embrace theſe truths may be an important duty, and to diſbelieve or reject them may be highly criminal: and God may very juſtly interpoſe his authority to require the one, and warn men againſt the other.

The author all along ſuppoſeth, that the faith required in the goſpel is no more than a bare aſſent of the underſtanding, and the unbelief there condemned is a mere ſpeculative diſſent. But this is a wrong repreſentation: nothing is more evident than that the faith required in the goſpel of thoſe to whom it is made known, that faith to which the promiſes are made, is a complex thing: it includeth a love of truth, and a diſpoſition to embrace and profeſs it, which, in the circumſtances in which Chriſtianity firſt appeared, argued a great deal both of candour and fortitude: and it is always repreſented to be of a vital operative nature, a principle of holy obedience, and which purifieth the heart, and leadeth men to do the will of God, and obey his commands. And ſuch a faith is certainly a virtue, and very properly the ſubject of a divine command: and the unbelief there condemned is ſuppoſed to proceed from men's being under the influence of corrupt affections and prejudices, and from their unwillingneſs to receive the truth, becauſe their deeds are evil. It is expreſſed by their *ſhutting* their eyes, and *hardening* their hearts, leſt they ſhould *ſee with their eyes*, and *underſtand with their hearts*, and be *converted* and *healed*. And this certainly argueth a bad and vicious diſpoſition of ſoul, and leadeth to diſobedience; and is therefore very properly forbidden in the divine law.

With regard to human laws, when they are once ſufficiently promulgated, it would ſcarce be accepted as a plea for men's neglecting or breaking thoſe laws, that they are not ſatisfied that they are the king's laws, and that no man can be juſtly obliged, under

the reſtraint of authority and penalties, to aſſent to this propoſition, that theſe are the king's laws; ſince aſſent is not in our own power. It is very probable, that a way would ſoon be found to over-rule this plea, and convince them that authority could interpoſe in this matter. In like manner, it ſeems to be obvious to the common ſenſe and reaſon of mankind, that if God hath given a revelation or diſcovery of his will, concerning doctrines and laws of importance to our duty and happineſs, and hath cauſed them to be promulgated with ſuch evidence as he knoweth to be ſufficient to convince reaſonable and well-diſpoſed minds, that will carefully attend to it, he hath an undoubted right to require thoſe to whom this revelation is publiſhed to receive and to obey it. And if, through the influence of corrupt affections and luſts, thoſe to whom this revelation is made known refuſe to receive it, he can juſtly puniſh them for their culpable neglect, obſtinacy, and diſobedience. Our author himſelf, ſpeaking of the ſpirit's working faith in all men, ſaith, though in evident contradiction to his own ſcheme, that, "the tender of this conviction, however potent in "its influence, may yet depend greatly upon the proper diſ-"poſitions of our minds to give it a reception for its efficacy; "and ſo far will give place, and afford ample matter of trial and "probation, and become indeed a teſt of our obedience. And "that in this caſe diſbelief and guilt have a meaning when put "together; ſince the compliance required is, not a compliance "out of our power, nor any longer that of the underſtanding, "but of the will, in its nature free, and therefore accountable; "and though we are not by any means chargeable for the effects "of our apprehenſion, yet there is no reaſon but that we may "be with all juſtice called to the ſtricteſt account for our ob-"ſtinacy, impiety, and perverſeneſs*."

I ſhall only take notice of one thing more, and which is indeed the moſt plauſible thing in his whole book, and that is, that the generality of mankind, even of thoſe among whom Chriſtianity is publiſhed, cannot be obliged to believe it, becauſe they have not a capacity to diſcern and judge of the proofs and arguments which are brought for it. But though it ſhould be allowed, that they could not of themſelves trace thoſe proofs and evidences;

* Chriſtianity not founded on Argument, p. 64.

yet

yet there are few but may be made ſenſible of the force of thoſe proofs and evidences, when ſet before them by others. And this is ſufficient. It is evident to any one that knows mankind, that we are ſo conſtituted, as to ſtand in need of mutual aſſiſtance and information, in matters of great conſequence to our duty and happineſs. Moſt of the principles of ſcience of every kind are things that muſt be taught; and there are few that reaſon out thoſe principles for themſelves, but proceed upon them as demonſtrated by others, and apply themſelves to practiſe the rules that are founded on thoſe principles. In like manner religion muſt be taught, or the moſt of mankind will know but little of it. And if it requireth care and application to underſtand its doctrines and precepts, and the evidences whereby it is confirmed, this is no argument at all, either againſt its reaſonableneſs or excellence: for nothing that is truly excellent in knowledge or practice is to be attained to without care and diligence. It is every man's duty in this caſe to take in what helps and informations he can get: and if we can come to perceive the evidence by the aſſiſtance of others, this will anſwer the purpoſes of religion as well as if we could do it merely by the force of our own reaſon without any aſſiſtance at all.

It would undoubtedly be a thing above the capacity of the generality of mankind, and what the moſt learned would not be well fitted for, to trace out all the parts of religion and morality, by a regular deduction from the firſt principles in a way of abſtracted reaſoning: and therefore it is a great advantage, that God hath given a clear revelation of his will, containing, in plain and expreſs propoſitions, the principles and doctrines which are of greateſt importance to be known, and the duties which are moſt neceſſary to be practiſed. Such a revelation is ſet before us in the goſpel: and the evident marks of diſintereſtedneſs that appear in it, without the leaſt traces of a worldly ſpirit or deſign, the purity and excellence of its doctrines and precepts, and the uniform tendency of the whole for promoting the glory of God, and the good of mankind, and the cauſe of virtue and righteouſneſs in the world, furniſh arguments obvious to common capacities, that this religion owed not its riſe to human policy, to the arts of impoſtors, or to evil beings, but was of a godlike and heavenly original. And as to hiſtorical evidence, perſons of com-

mon-ſound underſtanding may be made ſenſible, by the help of the learned, that we have all the evidence of the truth of the extraordinary facts, whereby the divine authority of the Chriſtian religion was atteſted, which can be reaſonably deſired: That moſt of thoſe facts were of a public nature, which might have been eaſily detected and expoſed if they had been falſe; in which caſe that religion, which had nothing elſe to ſupport it, and was deſtitute of all worldly advantages, muſt have fallen at once. But that this was ſo far from being the caſe, that the greateſt enemies of Chriſtianity are not able to deny, that, upon the credit of thoſe facts, this religion, though directly oppoſite to the prejudices which then univerſally obtained, and though it had the moſt unſurmountable difficulties to encounter with, and had all the powers of the world engaged againſt it, ſoon made a wonderful progreſs both among Jews and Gentiles; which, as things were circumſtanced, cannot otherwiſe be accounted for, than by admitting the truth of thoſe extraordinary facts: That the original revelation itſelf, together with an account of thoſe facts, was committed to writing in the very age in which that revelation was firſt given, and thoſe facts were done; which is a ſure method of conveyance, though oral tradition is a very uncertain one: And that theſe accounts, which were written by perſons who were perfectly acquainted with the things they relate, and which have all the characters of purity, artleſs undiſguiſed ſimplicity, and an impartial regard to truth, that any writings can poſſibly have, were in that very age received with great veneration, as of ſacred authority. The copies of them were ſoon ſpread abroad into many different countries; they were read in the public aſſemblies, tranſlated into various languages, and they have been ever ſince ſo conſtantly cited and appealed to in every age by perſons of different ſects and parties, many of whom have tranſcribed large portions of them into their writings, that it may be juſtly ſaid, they have been tranſmitted with a continued evidence, far greater than can be produced for any other books in the world; and that a general corruption of them, if any had attempted it, would have been an impoſſible thing. There is nothing in all this, but what perſons of common ſound ſenſe, who are deſirous of information, may be ſufficiently aſſured of by the aſſiſtance of the learned; and when, beſides this, they feel the power and

influence

influence of the doctrines and motives propoſed in thoſe ſacred writings upon their own hearts, comforting them in all the viciſſitudes of mortal life, and animating them to all virtue and goodneſs, this completeth their ſatisfaction and aſſurance; eſpecially when it is farther conſidered, that we are taught in ſcripture to hope, that God's gracious aſſiſtances will not be wanting to thoſe that with honeſt hearts and upright intentions endeavour to know and do the will of God. *For if any man will do his will*, ſaith our Saviour, *he ſhall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I ſpeak of myſelf*, John vii. 17.

Our author, in order to ſhew that the generality of mankind are incapable of judging of the evidence for Chriſtianity, hath taken upon him to pronounce, that there are few that are capable of reaſoning at all, *if there is the leaſt of induction or inference in the caſe**. And this, if it proveth that they are under no obligation to believe Chriſtianity, equally proveth, that they are under no obligation to believe natural religion, not even the exiſtence of a God, or a providence; ſince here there is certainly room for induction and inference. But the truth is, this is a very falſe and baſe repreſentation of human nature: it would follow from it, that the generality of men are incapable of moral agency, of virtue and vice, or of being governed by laws: for this ſuppoſeth them capable of underſtanding what thoſe laws are, and what is the duty required of them, and of making inferences and deductions. And with regard to religion, and its proofs and evidences, it can ſcarce be doubted, that if men applied themſelves to it with the ſame care and diligence that they generally do in matters of much leſs conſequence, they would attain to ſuch a ſenſe of religion and its evidences, as would both make it reaſonable for them to believe it, and to govern their practice by it.

There were ſeveral good anſwers publiſhed to *Chriſtianity not founded on Argument*. One of the firſt that appeared was that written by Dr. Doddridge, which I remember to have read with pleaſure, but as I have not had an opportunity of ſeeing it for ſome years, cannot give a particular account of it. I ſhall confine myſelf to thoſe anſwers which I have now by me.

* Chriſtianity not founded on Argument, p. 17, 18.

The first I shall mention is intitled, *The Reasonableness of the Christian Religion, as delivered in the Scriptures, being an Answer to a late Treatise, intitled, "Christianity not founded on Argument,"* by George Benson, afterwards Dr. Benson, London, 8vo. 1743. This may be regarded not merely as an answer to that pamphlet, but as a good defence of Christianity in general, and so the learned author designed it. It consisteth of three parts. In the first part, after having settled the meaning of the word *faith*, and shewn what that faith is, which the gospel requireth of those to whom it is made known, and to which rewards are there annexed, and that it is really a virtue; and what that unbelief is which is there forbidden, and condemned, and that it is really a vice; he goes on to produce some of the principal arguments which prove the truth of the Christian religion. He first considers what are usually called the internal evidences of Christianity, the reasonableness of its doctrines, of its moral precepts, of its positive institutions, and of the sanctions by which it is enforced; and then considers the external evidences arising from prophecy and miracles, particularly from the resurrection of Christ, and the extraordinary gifts of the Holy Ghost poured forth upon the apostles and first Christians. These things are here set in a fair and agreeable light; and it is also shewn, that the accounts given of these things in the New Testament may be depended on, and that we have sufficient evidence of the truth and authenticity of the gospel records. In the second part a solid answer is given to the several objections and difficulties proposed by the author, with a view to shew that religion cannot be a rational thing. The third part contains a distinct explication of those texts of scripture which he had perverted and misapplied. And there is scarce any one text cited or referred to in his whole book which is not here particularly considered.

Not long after this, there was another valuable answer published, intitled, *The Christian's Faith a rational Assent, in Answer to a Pamphlet, intitled, "Christianity not founded on Argument,"* by Thomas Randolph, D. D. London, 1744. It was published in two parts, and divided into six chapters. In the first, the question in dispute is clearly stated, which is reduced to this: whether the Christian faith be founded on argument, and is ordinarily attainable in a rational way, or is to be acquired only

by

by a *particular revelation imparted ſupernaturally to every individual?* And he undertakes, in oppoſition to the author of that pamphlet, to ſhew, that the Chriſtian's faith ought to be founded upon the conviction of the underſtanding, and that it is a rational aſſent, by which he means, that juſt and ſatisfactory reaſons may be given for the hope and faith we profeſs. He conſiders the nature of aſſent, and ſhews, that we are not wholly paſſive in believing or diſbelieving, but have a great compaſs of liberty in the uſe of thoſe faculties on which aſſent depends; and that therefore faith may be a virtue, and argue a good diſpoſition of mind, and unbelief be vicious and criminal. In his ſecond chapter, he fairly examines and clearly confutes the author's arguments drawn from the nature of reaſon and religion: and in the third, the arguments from ſcripture, by which he pretends to prove, that we are not to uſe our underſtandings in matters of religion. In his fourth chapter, he inquires into the author's own ſcheme, and the principle of goſpel evidence which he has thought fit to aſſign, which he wholly reſolveth into an immediate, infallible, ſupernatural revelation, darted with an irreſiſtible light into the mind of every particular perſon: the abſurdity of this Dr. Randolph expoſes, and anſwers the pretended proofs brought from ſcripture in ſupport of it. The fifth chapter contains a good account of the proofs of the Chriſtian religion, with a particular conſideration of the objections of this writer againſt miracles and traditional teſtimony. Laſtly, he takes notice of the reflections thrown out by the author of that pamphlet againſt the Church of England in particular.

You will probably expect, that I ſhould take ſome notice of another anſwer, which appeared about the ſame time, and which alſo met with a favourable reception from the public, viz. *Remarks on a late Pamphlet, intitled, "Chriſtianity not founded on Argument."* Theſe remarks, which were drawn up by me at your own deſire, were contained in two letters that were publiſhed ſeparately, London, 1744. The deſign of this anſwer, which was much ſhorter than either of the former, was not to enter upon a diſtinct and particular account of the evidences which are uſually produced in proof of the Chriſtian religion, which the author of theſe letters had conſidered largely on ſome former occaſions, but to repreſent in a clear and conciſe manner

the abſurdity and ill tendency, as well as manifold inconſiſtencies, of this writer's ſcheme; to give a plain confutation of the principal arguments from ſcripture and reaſon, by which he has pretended to ſupport it, and to detect and expoſe his fallacies and miſrepreſentations.

But it is time to take leave of this writer, whom I have taken the more particular notice of, becauſe ſome of his objections are managed with great art, and have a ſpecious appearance.

LETTER XII.

The Reſurrection of Chriſt an Article that lies at the Foundation of the Chriſtian Faith—Attacked with great Confidence in a Pamphlet, intitled, The Reſurrection of Jeſus conſidered—*What this Writer offers to prove, that Chriſt did not foretel his own Reſurrection, and that the Story of the Chief Prieſts ſetting a Watch at the Sepulchre is a Forgery and Fiction, examined and confuted—Obſervations on the extraordinary Way he takes to fix Contradictions on the Evangeliſts—The Rules by which he would judge of their Accounts would not be endured, if applied to any other Writings—He inſiſts on farther Evidence of Chriſt's Reſurrection; and yet plainly intimates, that no Evidence that could be given would ſatisfy him—Extravagant Demands of the Deiſtical Writers on this Head conſidered—The Evidence that was actually given, the propereſt that could be given—The ſeeming Variations among the Evangeliſts, if rightly conſidered, furniſh a Proof of the Truth and Genuineneſs of the Goſpel Records—An Account of the Anſwers publiſhed to this Author, eſpecially of Mr. Weſt's* Obſervations on the Hiſtory and Reſurrection of Jeſus Chriſt *—Sir George Littleton's* Obſervations on the Converſion and Apoſtleſhip of St. Paul *commended.*

SIR,

THE reſurrection of Chriſt is an article of vaſt importance, which lieth at the foundation of Chriſtianity: if this faileth, the Chriſtian religion cannot be maintained, or may be proved to be falſe. *If Chriſt be not riſen* (ſaith St. Paul), *then is our preaching vain, your faith is alſo vain*, 1 Cor. xv. 14. On the other hand, if this holdeth good, the divine miſſion and authority of the bleſſed Founder of our holy religion is eſtabliſhed. This is what he himſelf appealed to, as the great and ultimate proof, which was to convince mankind that he was what he profeſſed himſelf to be, the Son of God, the Saviour of the world. If he had been an artful impoſtor, it can ſcarce be ſuppoſed that he would have appealed to ſuch a proof as this, which would have been

been the moſt effectual way he could have taken to detect and expoſe the vanity of his own pretences, and overturn the whole ſcheme of his religion: or, if he had been an enthuſiaſt, and was impoſed upon by the warmth of his own imagination, to believe that God would indeed raiſe him from the dead, the event would have effectually ſhewn the folly and madneſs of his expectations. And, therefore, ſince he put the proof of his divine miſſion upon a thing of ſo extraordinary a nature, which manifeſtly exceeded all human power, and was actually enabled to accompliſh it, this ſhews, both that he certainly knew that he was ſent of God, and that he really was ſo. And indeed it cannot be conceived how a more illuſtrious atteſtation could poſſibly have been given to him from heaven, than his reſurrection from the dead, in accompliſhment of his own prediction, and what followed upon it, his aſcenſion into heaven, and the extraordinary effuſion of the Holy Ghoſt upon his diſciples, as he himſelf had promiſed. This the enemies of our holy religion are ſenſible of; and therefore, though they have ſometimes affected to argue, that, ſuppoſing Chriſt to have really riſen from the dead, this would not be a valid proof of the truth of the Chriſtian revelation*, they have in all ages bent their utmoſt efforts againſt it. Celſus employed all his wit and malice to ridicule it: ſo have others done ſince: of late Mr. Woolſton had diſtinguiſhed himſelf this way; and no part of his diſcourſes on the miracles of our Saviour was ſo much laboured, as that wherein he endeavoured to ſhew, that the account given by the evangeliſts of Chriſt's reſurrection is a falſe and incredible ſtory. But the weakneſs of his objections was clearly ſhewn in the anſwers that were made to him; among which *The Trial of the Witneſſes*, &c. was eſpecially remarkable, both for the ſtrength of the reaſoning, and the ingenious and polite manner of treating the argument. Mr. Woolſton himſelf never attempted to vindicate that part of his Diſcourſes againſt the anſwers that had been given to it. But after ſeveral years had paſſed, a bold adventurer appears in a pamphlet, intitled, *The Reſurrection of Jeſus conſidered, in Anſwer to the Trial of the Witneſſes, by a Moral Phi-*

* See a Letter, ſaid to be written by Mr. Collins, to the author of the "Diſcourſe on the Grounds, &c." in anſwer to Mr. Green's Letters, publiſhed in 1726.

loſopher,

Iosopher, London, 1744; so this gentleman thinks proper to stile himself, as Dr. Morgan had done before him. Like that writer, he appears to be of great vivacity, and no small degree of confidence, and to have a high opinion of his own abilities and performances; and, like him, seems resolved to put all the arts of controversy in practice, by which he thinks he might carry his point, without being very solicitous whether they are properly reconcileable to truth or candour. He has with great diligence raked together all that a lively imagination, animated with the most determined malice, could invent or suggest, for misrepresenting and exposing the gospel-history; nor does he, as some others had done, any-where pretend a regard to the religion of Jesus, but all along openly declares against it; in which he is so far to be commended, if he had but acted the part of a fair, as he doth of a professed adversary.

The principal things observable in this treatise, with relation to the declared design of it, the overthrowing the accounts that are given us of the resurrection of Jesus, may be reduced to these three heads: 1. He undertakes to prove, that Christ did not foretel his death and resurrection at all, neither to the Jewish priests and Pharisees, nor to his own disciples; and that all that the evangelists say on this head is mere fiction and forgery. 2. That the whole story of the Jewish priests and rulers setting a watch at the sepulchre, and sealing the stone, is false, and a most absurd and incredible fiction. 3. That the accounts given by the evangelists of Christ's resurrection are in every part inconsistent and self-contradictory, and carry plain marks of fraud and imposture. I shall make some observations on each of these; and, that I may not return to this subject again, shall take notice, as I go along, of some things advanced by Mr. Chubb, in his posthumous works, to enforce the objections of this writer.

It is of great importance to our author's cause to prove, if he was able to do it, that Jesus did not foretel his own death and resurrection: for if he did foretel it, and it was known that he did so, this makes the precautions taken by the chief priests to prevent an imposition in this matter absolutely necessary; and the whole story is perfectly consistent. Besides that, as hath been already hinted, his foretelling a thing of such a nature, which, if he had been an impostor, he must have known it would be

be abſolutely out of his power to accompliſh, and which yet was actually fulfilled, affords the moſt convincing proof, that he was really that extraordinary and divine perſon he profeſſed himſelf to be. Our author ſaw this, and therefore has made an attempt to ſhew, that Jeſus did not foretel his death and reſurrection, neither to the Jewiſh prieſts and Phariſees, nor to his own diſciples. With regard to the former, it appeareth from the teſtimony of the evangeliſts, St. Matthew and St. Luke, that when the Scribes and Phariſees deſired Jeſus to ſhew them a *ſign from heaven*, he told them, that *no ſign ſhould be given, but the ſign of the prophet Jonas*. And St Matthew farther informs us, that he then openly declared to them, that *as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly*, ſo ſhould the *Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth*, Matth. xii. 38, 39, 40. Which plainly ſuppoſed, that, in that ſpace of time, he ſhould, after lying in the earth or grave, riſe out of it, as Jonas came alive out of the belly of the fiſh. From this prediction therefore, which was uttered more than once in the hearing of the Scribes and Phariſees, they might gather that he intended to ſignify that he ſhould riſe again from the dead. What this writer hath offered againſt this is very trifling. Becauſe St. Luke, in mentioning what our Saviour ſaid concerning the ſign of the prophet Jonas, doth not expreſsly take notice of his declaring, that the Son of man ſhould lie three days and nights in the heart of the earth, he pretends that this is a proof that St. Matthew forged it. Whereas all that it proves is, that St. Matthew hath given a fuller relation of what our Saviour ſaid on that occaſion, than St. Luke hath done; though what the latter relateth concerning Chriſt's mentioning the ſign of the prophet Jonas, plainly implieth it. He alſo repeats what Mr. Woolſton had urged, that Chriſt did not lie three days and nights in the grave; of which I took ſome notice before in my remarks on Mr. Woolſton's diſcourſes. He farther hints at what Mr. Chubb, who wrote after our author, and endeavours to reinforce his objections, has enlarged upon for ſeveral pages together *, that Jeſus could not have made ſuch a declaration as this, that *no ſign ſhould be given to that wicked and adulterous generation, but the ſign of the prophet Jonas*;

* Chubb's poſthumous works, vol. i. p. 342—347.

both

both becauſe their being a wicked generation was rather a reaſon for giving them a ſign, ſince in that caſe they needed it moſt, and the deſign of his coming was to call ſinners to repentance; and becauſe in fact Chriſt did work ſigns and wonders among them after this. But to take off the force of this, it is ſufficient to obſerve, that by comparing Matth. xvi. 1. Luke xi. 16. Mark viii. 11. it appeareth, that the ſign they demanded was a *ſign from heaven*, by which they probably meant ſome glorious appearance in the heavens. They had a little before attributed his miracles to Beelzebub: and now they inſiſted that he ſhould give them a particular kind of ſign; and it was perfectly conſiſtent with his character to refuſe to humour them in this demand, which he well knew proceeded from a cavilling temper, and not from minds honeſtly willing to ſubmit to evidence. But though he refuſed to give them at that time preciſely ſuch a ſign as they demanded, he yet both continued to work miracles among them, and referred them to his reſurrection, which, taking in the circumſtances that attended it, and followed upon it, was, in the fulleſt and propereſt ſenſe, *a ſign from heaven*, and was ſufficient to convince them, if they were diſpoſed to receive conviction. To this it may be added, what St. John informs us of, that in a diſcourſe addreſſed to a great number of the Jews, among whom were ſeveral of his malicious enemies, he plainly ſpoke of his *laying down his life*, and *taking it again*, and declared that *this commandment he had received of his father*, John x. 17, 18, 19, 20.

As to his own diſciples, under which character others beſides the twelve apoſtles are often comprehended, the author himſelf acknowledgeth, that the evangeliſts repreſent him as having declared to them in plain and expreſs terms, on five different occaſions, that he ſhould ſuffer and die, and riſe again on the third day. But becauſe they tell us, that the diſciples *did not underſtand this ſaying*, and that it was *hid from them*, and that they *queſtioned among themſelves, what this riſing from the dead ſhould mean*, he would have the whole paſs for forgery and fiction. He thinks it incredible, that twelve men could hear ſuch plain expreſſions, ſo clearly foretelling his dying and riſing again, and yet not be able to underſtand them. But this is eaſily accounted for, conſidering that the diſciples were at that time under the power of thoſe prejudices, which then generally prevailed among

among the Jews, relating to the Meſſiah. They could not conceive how the Meſſiah, who, according to their notions of things, was *to abide for ever*, and not die at all*, could be ſubject to ſufferings and death: nor conſequently how he ſhould riſe again from the dead. When therefore they heard Jeſus, whom they looked upon to be the Meſſiah, talk of his dying and riſing again on the third day, they thought it muſt be underſtood in ſome myſtical or figurative ſenſe, and that ſome meaning which they did not at preſent comprehend lay hid under thoſe expreſſions, however plain they might appear: ſo that this only ſhews the dulneſs of their apprehenſions, and the force of their prejudices, and at the ſame time the impartiality of the evangelical hiſtorians who have recorded it. But though the diſciples could not conceive how Chriſt ſhould die and riſe again on the third day, yet as he ſo often repeated it on different occaſions, without ever giving the leaſt injunction to them to conceal it, it may juſtly be ſuppoſed that the ſaying got abroad, and was known to many: And this coming to the ears of the Jewiſh chief-prieſts and Phariſees, who alſo knew what he had ſaid to ſome of the Phariſees and Scribes concerning the ſign of the prophet Jonas, was a ſufficient foundation to them to ſay to Pilate, *We remember that that deceiver ſaid* (not that he *ſaid to us*, as this gentleman thinks fit to quote it, but that *he ſaid*), *while he was yet alive, after three days I will riſe again*. There needed no more to put them upon all proper precautions to prevent an impoſture in this matter.

This leads me to take ſome notice of the ſecond main thing this writer inſiſteth upon, which is, that the ſtory St. Matthew tells of the chief-prieſts ſetting a watch at the ſepulchre, and ſealing the ſtone, is a falſe and abſurd fiction. Mr. Woolſton had allowed the truth of the ſtory, and built one of his principal arguments againſt the reſurrection of Jeſus upon the circumſtance of ſealing the ſtone. And this argument was mightily cried up for a while. But our author had the ſagacity to diſcern, that if this was admitted, it would afford a ſtrong preſumption of the truth and reality of Chriſt's reſurrection; and therefore thinks it more for the intereſt of his cauſe to deny it. The chief thing he urgeth againſt the ſtory proceeds upon the ſuppoſition, that

* See John, xii. 34.

Jeſus

Jeſus did not foretel his reſurrection at all, nor had the Jewiſh prieſts and Phariſees heard that he had foretold it; and therefore it is abſurd to think they would give themſelves concern about it, But the falſehood of this ſuppoſition hath been already ſhewn; nor is there any thing in the whole ſtory, as related by St. Matthew, that is not perfectly conſiſtent, and highly probable. It is very natural to ſuppoſe, conſidering their characters and diſpoſitions, and the circumſtances of the caſe, that they would take the fitteſt precautions, that the diſciples of Jeſus might not have it in their power to pretend he was riſen from the dead, as it was reported he had foretold: and there could not be a more probable method fixed upon for this purpoſe, than the ſetting a watch to guard the ſepulchre, and ſealing the ſtone that was rolled to the mouth of it. And though we ſhould allow them to have known, as this writer affirms they did, that Nicodemus and Joſeph of Arimathea had wound up the body in linen and ſpices, which ſhewed they did not expect his reſurrection, yet they knew he had other diſciples; and beſides might ſuſpect, that all this preparation for embalming the body, was only the better to cover their deſign of carrying it away. What he farther urgeth concerning their believing him to have been, what they called him to Pilate, a deceiver, inſtead of being an argument, as he would have it to be, againſt their uſing this precaution, would furniſh a ſtrong reaſon for it: ſince in that caſe they might be apt to ſuſpect that his diſciples would act the part of deceivers too; and endeavour to carry on the impoſture, which therefore they were reſolved to prevent. And they might think this one of the moſt effectual methods they could take to convince the people, many of whom they knew had a high veneration for Jeſus, that he was a falſe prophet, by ſhewing the falſehood of his prediction, concerning his riſing again the third day, which would juſtify their own conduct in putting him to death.

This author thinks it incredible, that the Jews ſhould bribe the ſoldiers to be ſilent, when they themſelves muſt upon their report have been convinced of the truth of the fact. But their conduct on this occaſion was no other than might be expected from perſons of their character. Whoſoever conſiders their determined malice and envy againſt Jeſus, who had unmaſked their hypocriſy, and oppoſed their traditions; how deeply their repu-

tation

putation was engaged, and their authority with the people, as well as that of the Sanhedrim, who claimed to themſelves a power of trying prophets, and had condemned him as a falſe prophet and blaſphemer, muſt be ſenſible how unwilling they would be to have it thought, that they had wrongfully procured a moſt excellent perſon to be crucified, and that they would take all poſſible methods, by ſtifling the evidence, to throw off the odium from themſelves. To which may be added the power of their prejudices, which would not ſuffer them to imagine, that a perſon who had been crucified could poſſibly be their Meſſiah, which was abſolutely ſubverſive of all their maxims. They who, when they could not deny his miracles, aſcribed them to a diabolical power, ſhewed what they were capable of. And indeed the force of obſtinate prejudice, hatred, envy, pride, and a deſire of maintaining their own authority, all which concurred in this caſe, is amazing, and hath often cauſed perſons to ſtand out againſt the cleareſt evidence.

The laſt thing he hath to offer is, that St. Matthew is the only evangeliſt who relateth the ſtory of ſealing the ſtone, and placing the watch; but this is of ſmall moment: St. Matthew's relation of it is ſufficient. He wrote his goſpel, by the conſent of all antiquity, the firſt of the evangeliſts, in a few years after our Lord's aſcenſion, and deſigned it eſpecially for the uſe of the Jewiſh converts: and his relating this ſtory in a goſpel publiſhed among the Jews, and ſo early in that very age when the ſtory muſt have been freſh in remembrance, and when, if falſe, it might have been eaſily contradicted, ſhews that it was a thing well known, and that he was fully aſſured of the truth of it, and in no fear of being detected in a falſehood. And what farther confirmeth this, is his referring to a report as current among the Jews at the time when he wrote, concerning the diſciples having ſtolen the body, whilſt the ſoldiers that were ſet to watch the ſepulchre ſlept. The ſtory indeed was not very conſiſtent; but yet, as the caſe is circumſtanced, it was the beſt thing they had to ſay. The body was gone out of the ſepulchre; either therefore it muſt be acknowledged that he roſe again from the dead, or that his diſciples had taken it away: and this, if done at all, muſt have been done either with the connivance of the guards that were ſet to watch it, or when they were aſleep: the guards,

if

if charged with having connived at it, and with having been bribed by the diſciples, would have been obliged to juſtify themſelves againſt that charge, and would have told the fact as it really happened: there was nothing therefore left but to pretend that it was done whilſt they were aſleep. And yet the rulers never pretended to convict the diſciples of having ſtolen the body, nor inſtituted any proceſs againſt them on that account; but contented themſelves with threatening to puniſh them if they preached the reſurrection of Jeſus, which yet they boldly avowed to their faces. As to the author's inſinuation, how came St. Matthew to know of the angel's appearing to the ſoldiers with ſuch circumſtances of terror, if they were hired to conceal it; this is eaſily accounted for: it is only ſaid that *ſome of the watch* went and told the chief prieſts, Matth. xxviii. 11. It may therefore be reaſonably ſuppoſed, that others of them might, immediately after the thing happened, tell it to ſome other perſons: yea, it might probably happen, that ſome of thoſe who were then hired and bribed might diſcover it afterwards, when all was over; or that ſome of the prieſts, many of whom were afterwards converted to the Chriſtian faith, as we learn from Acts vi. 7. might have known and divulged it.

Thus it appeareth, that this writer's principal objections againſt this ſtory, and which he inſiſteth upon as manifeſt proofs of the abſolute falſehood and forgery of the goſpel-hiſtory, are of no force. And yet he taketh upon him to pronounce, that *it is in all views abſurd* to ſuppoſe, *that the Prieſts and Phariſees ſhould guard againſt a reſurrection; fraudulent or real.*

He next proceeds to inquire how the witneſſes agree in their evidence, and endeavoureth to prove, that the accounts the evangeliſts give of the reſurrection of Jeſus are in every part inconſiſtent and ſelf-contradictory, and carry plain marks of fraud and impoſture. And here I ſhall not enter into a diſtinct examination of the ſeveral more minute particulars he inſiſteth upon, which are all conſidered and diſcuſſed in the anſwers that were made to him, but ſhall content myſelf with ſome general obſervations upon his management of the ſubject: and firſt I would obſerve, that he has thought fit to conſider the accounts of the three evangeliſts, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, ſeparately from St. John; whereas they ought all to be taken together, ſince they all relate

to the ſame fact of Chriſt's reſurrection: he poſitively aſſerteth, that the three evangeliſts mention in general but three appearances of Jeſus; whereas there are plainly ſeven appearances of Jeſus after his reſurrection referred to by them, beſides two others peculiarly mentioned by St. John: 1. His appearing to Mary Magdalen alone, Mark xvi. 9. John xx. 14, 15, 16, 17. 2. His appearing to the women, Matth. xxviii. 9. 3. His appearing to the two diſciples going to Emmaus, Mark xvi. 12. Luke xxiv. 13—32. 4. His appearing to Simon Peter, Luke xxiv. 34. 1 Cor. xv. 5. 5. His appearing to the eleven as they ſat at meat on the evening of the day on which he roſe, Luke xxiv. 36—43. John xx. 19—23. 6. His appearing to his diſciples on a mountain in Galilee, Matth. xxviii. 16, 17. 7. His appearing to his diſciples on the day of his aſcenſion, Mark xvi. 19, 20. Luke xxiv. 50, 51, 52. Acts i. 6—11. Beſides theſe, there are two other appearances of Jeſus recorded by St. John, which are not taken notice of by the other evangeliſts: one is, that to the eleven, when St. Thomas was with them, eight days after the firſt, John xx. 26—29. The other is, that at the ſea of Tiberias, to ſeven of the diſciples, John xxi. 1—14. Here are nine diſtinct appearances pointed out by the evangeliſts, which were at different times, and are plainly marked out by diſtinct characters. But this author, in order to have a pretence for charging theſe writers with contradictions, thinks fit to confound theſe different appearances: and the different circumſtances and variations, which ſhew that they belong to different appearances, are repreſented by him as ſo many inconſiſtencies in the relation of the ſame appearance. But by this way of management, inſtead of proving contradictions upon the evangeliſts, he only proves his own unfairneſs and abſurdity. Thus, *e. g.* St. Luke relates an appearance of Jeſus to his diſciples at Jeruſalem, on the very evening of the reſurrection day; St. Matthew tells of an appearance of his to his diſciples at a mountain in Galilee, which muſt have been ſome time after. The time and place of theſe appearances are manifeſtly different; which ſhould lead every perſon of candour to regard them as different appearances; but our author is pleaſed to ſuppoſe them to relate to the ſame appearance, and then chargeth theſe different circumſtances as to time and place, as ſo many contradictions and inconſiſtencies. This muſt be owned

to

to be a very extraordinary way of proceeding; and at this rate it will be eaſy to expoſe the moſt authentic hiſtory that ever was written.

There is another rule frequently made uſe of by this writer, and upon which his charge of contradictions againſt the evangeliſts principally dependeth, and that is, that if any one of them takes notice of any circumſtance or event not mentioned by the reſt, this is to paſs for a proof of fiction and forgery. According to this new rule of criticiſm, where ſeveral hiſtorians give an account of the ſame facts, if ſome of them relate thoſe facts with more, and ſome with fewer circumſtances, this ſhall be ſufficient abſolutely to deſtroy the credit of the whole; and they that omit a circumſtance, or ſay nothing at all about it, muſt be looked upon as contradicting thoſe that mention it. Upon this principle, St. Mark and St. Luke are made to contradict one another; becauſe the latter mentions Bethany or mount Olivet as the place from whence Jeſus aſcended, and the former, in mentioning Chriſt's aſcenſion, takes no notice of the place from whence he aſcended. In like manner it is pretended, that St. Matthew and St. John, in contradiction to the two other evangeliſts, ſay, that Jeſus never aſcended at all, becauſe they give no diſtinct account of his aſcenſion, though they evidently ſuppoſe it; and there are more references to it in St. John's goſpel, than in any one of the evangeliſts: ſee John vi. 62. vii. 39. xiv. 2. 28. xvi. 7. 16. 28. xvii. 5. 11. xx. 17. So becauſe the laſt mentioned evangeliſt is the only one of them that mentions the piercing the ſide of Jeſus with a ſpear, of which he himſelf was an eye-witneſs, and gives an account of ſome appearances of Jeſus to his diſciples not mentioned by the other evangeliſts, this ſhews, according to our author, that he forged thoſe accounts, and that *his evidence deſtroys theirs, or they his;* though one deſign of his writing his goſpel was to take notice of things which they had omitted: nor do any of them give the leaſt hint that they propoſed diſtinctly to recount all Chriſt's appearances.

In order to fix the charge of contradictions and inconſiſtencies upon the evangeliſts, he pretendeth, that, according to St. Luke, our Lord aſcended the very evening of the day of his reſurrection. The only proof he bringeth for ſo ſtrange an aſſertion is, that St.

Luke, immediately after having given an account of our Lord's appearing to the eleven diſciples, and others with them, Luke xxiv. 36. and which, by comparing ver. 29 and 33, was pretty late in the evening of the day on which he roſe, tells us, that he led them out as far as Bethany, where *he was parted from them, and carried up into heaven*, ver. 50, 51. And this he might juſtly ſay, though there was an interval of ſeveral days between the one and the other; and it is manifeſt from other accounts there was, and particularly from what St. Luke himſelf ſaith in the beginning of the Acts of the Apoſtles. It is plain that he intends here only to give a ſummary narration; and therefore, after having taken notice of his firſt appearance to the eleven, the account of which ends at ver. 43, he paſſeth over the other appearances without a diſtinct mention; only giving the ſubſtance of what Jeſus ſaid on ſome of thoſe occaſions, and which he introduces thus, ὅτι δὲ αὐτοῖς, which may be thus underſtood, *he ſaid beſides*, or *moreover, unto them:* and then he proceeds to give a ſhort account of Chriſt's aſcenſion, and of what followed upon it, which he more diſtinctly relateth in the book of the Acts.

St. Luke obſerves, that the women, when they went to the ſepulchre, *found not the body of Jeſus*, Luke xxiv. 3. This our candid author repreſents as if he had ſaid, that they never ſaw Jeſus at all after his reſurrection, dead or alive; and then would have this, which is a manifeſt perverſion of St. Luke's meaning, paſs for a contradiction to the other evangeliſts, who tell that Jeſus was ſeen of the women after he roſe again from the dead. To prove that the other evangeliſts contradict St. John, he repreſents St. Matthew, Mark, and Luke, as expreſsly declaring, that Jeſus appeared to the eleven diſciples *but once* after his reſurrection; and yet certain it is, that not one of them ſays any ſuch thing. Nor do the evangeliſts any where ſay, as he affirms they do, that Jeſus appeared *but to a very few* after he roſe from the dead, which he thinks contradicts the ſtory of the hundred and twenty, and five hundred, mentioned by the author of the Acts and St. Paul. He might as well have pretended, as Mr. Chubb did afterwards, though without offering the leaſt proof to ſupport it, that the word *hundred* in that paſſage, Acts i. 15. is an interpolation, and that inſtead of *an hundred and twenty*, it ſhould be read

read *twenty**. Such wretched ſhifts only diſcover a fixed reſolution not to believe any accounts that ſhould be given.

Our author endeavours to take great advantage, in which he is followed by the laſt-mentioned writer, of what is told us concerning Chriſt's appearing to the two diſciples going to Emmaus. Becauſe they did not for ſome time know Jeſus, it is argued, that he had not a true body, and that they could not be afterwards ſure that it was he: ſince, if their ſenſes were deceived at firſt, they might be ſo afterwards too; and the like may be ſuppoſed, as to all Chriſt's other appearances to his diſciples. That the two diſciples did not at firſt know Jeſus, is plain from the ſtory: and this may be accounted for in a natural way, if we ſuppoſe, that beſides ſome change which there might be in his countenance, occaſioned by his ſufferings and death, he might on purpoſe alter the tone of his voice, or have ſomething in his garb, his air and manner, different from what had been uſual with him before, or in ſome other way diſguiſe himſelf; which ſeems to be ſignified, when St. Mark, referring to this, ſaith, he *appeared in another form*, Mark xvi. 12. And this might hinder them from knowing him, conſidering how little at that time they expected to ſee him. Or, if we ſhould ſuppoſe, that he employed a miraculous power to prevent their at firſt knowing him, which was done for a valuable end, that he might have the better opportunity of inſtructing them in a familiar way in the true meaning of the ſcriptures relating to the Meſſiah, his ſufferings and glory, and thereby the better prepare them for the diſcovery he intended afterwards to make of himſelf; it by no means follows, that, becauſe they were withheld from knowing him for a while, therefore when he fully diſcovered himſelf to them, they could not be certain that it was he. It is plain, that they had afterwards ſuch convincing proofs that it was Jeſus, as left no room for doubt in their minds. And that very evening he ſhewed himſelf again to them, and to the eleven apoſtles, and others with them; and the more effectually to convince them, ſhewed them his hands and his feet, and ate and drank before them; and by the proofs which were given them, both on that and other occaſions, they had as full evidence of the reality of his riſen body, as they could have of any thing

* Chubb's poſthumous Works, vol. i. p. 378.

that came to them, confirmed by the teſtimony of their ſenſes. And to ſuppoſe an extraordinary miraculous power employed all along to deceive them and overrule all their ſenſes, would be to ſuppoſe as great a power employed to make them believe a falſehood, *i. e.* to make them believe that Jeſus was riſen when he was not ſo, as would have ſufficed for the truth of the reſurrection; ſince it would have been as eaſy for the divine power to have raiſed his body really from the dead, as to give all thoſe proofs and evidences that were given of a true body without the reality. As to his appearing among them when the *doors were ſhut*, which is alſo urged againſt the truth of his riſen body, all that can be fairly concluded from it is, that when the doors were ſhut, which the evangeliſt tells us was for fear of the Jews, Jeſus came ſuddenly among them, opening the doors at once by his miraculous power; not that his body paſſed through the doors by a penetration of dimenſions, which is the conſtruction the author puts upon it; for this would have entirely deſtroyed our Lord's own argument, which he uſed at that very time to convince them that he had a real body. *Behold* (ſaith he), my *hands*, and *feet*, *that it is I myſelf. Handle me, and ſee, for a ſpirit hath not fleſh and bones, as you ſee me have.* See Luke xxiv. 36. 39. compared with John xx, 19, 20.

It is obſervable that this writer, in his great eagerneſs to expoſe the evangelical accounts, ſeems not to conſider that ſome of the arguments he hath produced may be turned againſt him, and prove the contrary to what he produced them for. He frequently lays a mighty ſtreſs on thoſe paſſages which relate to the diſciples not having underſtood our Saviour, when he foretold his reſurrection before his death, and to their doubting of his reſurrection after it. And yet it is this very thing that gives the greateſt force to their teſtimony. If they had been prepoſſeſſed beforehand with a ſtrong belief that he would riſe again, or if they had immediately believed that he was riſen from the dead upon the firſt meſſage that was brought to them, it would undoubtedly have been aſcribed to the warmth of their imagination, and to a too forward credulity; but as the caſe is circumſtanced, there is no room for this pretence. It is plain, that nothing but the irreſiſtible evidence of their ſenſes brought them to believe at all; and their believing it ſo firmly at laſt, ſo as to be ready

to ſeal their teſtimony to it with their blood, ſhews, that they were conſtrained to believe by an evidence which they could not withſtand, and which abſolutely removed their doubts, and overcame all their prejudices.

The account given by the evangeliſts of Chriſt's reſurrection is farther confirmed by the teſtimony of St. Paul, who mentions his having been ſeen by Peter, by James, and by the twelve apoſtles; concerning which he had many opportunities of informing himſelf from the perſons themſelves. He alſo maketh mention of his having been ſeen of above five hundred brethren at once, and expreſsly affirms, as a thing he was well aſſured of, that the greater part of them were alive at the time when he wrote this; and it is not to be doubted, that he had ſeen and known many of them, to whoſe living teſtimonies he could then appeal. Theſe things he refers the Corinthians to in his epiſtle, as things known to be certainly true, and which could not be conteſted, and concerning which he himſelf had ſpoken to them more at large when he was with them, 1 Cor. xv. 1, 2, 3, &c. And in a diſpute which he there maintaineth againſt ſome who denied the future reſurrection of the dead, he principally argueth from the reſurrection of Chriſt, as a fact ſo fully proved, that they could not deny it. Yet our author is pleaſed to reject all this at once, becauſe St. Paul *writes by hearſay*, *i. e.* becauſe he was not himſelf preſent at thoſe appearances, though he had the account from thoſe who were ſo: and ſo fond is he of this thought, that he repeats it, as his manner is, in three or four different parts of his book. According to this rule, an hiſtorian is not to be credited in any fact of which he himſelf was not an eye-witneſs, though he might have undoubted aſſurance of it; a maxim which would deſtroy the credit of the beſt hiſtorians now in the world. But one ſhould think this writer would at leaſt allow, that St. Paul ought to be credited, when, after mentioning Chriſt's having appeared to others, he affirms, that he himſelf had ſeen Jeſus, 1 Cor. xv. 8. ix. 1. But it ſeems this alſo is to be rejected, under pretence that he only ſaw him in a viſion; though it was at noon-day, as he was travelling with ſeveral others in his company, and which was attended with ſuch remarkable circumſtances, and produced ſuch real effects, that if he could not be ſure of this, no man can be certain of any thing that he hears or ſees. Mr Chubb indeed, who faithfully treads in our author's ſteps,

takes upon him to affirm, that St. Paul's teſtimony weakens, inſtead of ſtrengthening, the evidence of Chriſt's reſurrection: for which he gives this reaſon, that though St. Paul had known Jeſus before his reſurrection, which it doth not appear he did, yet as that glorified body muſt have been different from what it had appeared to be whilſt he was on earth, he could not be a proper judge of the identity of that body with that body which had been crucified*. But it is to be conſidered, that what St. Paul was to be convinced of, and of which he himſelf was afterwards to be a witneſs, was, that Jeſus was raiſed again, and inveſted with a divine dominion and glory. And of this the appearing of Jeſus to him in the manner he did, as he was going to Damaſcus, and aſſuring him by a voice from heaven, that it was Jeſus whom he had perſecuted who then ſpoke to him, attended with ſuch amazing diſplays of a divine glory and ſplendor, together with the remarkable conſequences which then followed upon it, eſpecially the extraordinary miraculous gifts and powers with which he himſelf was endued, and which he was enabled to confer upon others in the name of a riſen Jeſus, exhibited the moſt illuſtrious and convincing proof and evidence that could poſſibly be deſired, and which abſolutely overcame all the ſtrong and obſtinate prejudices with which his mind was at that very time poſſeſſed. So that all things conſidered, there never was a teſtimony which deſerved greater regard than that of St. Paul, and accordingly it has juſtly had the greateſt weight in all ages.

I paſs by other inſtances that might be mentioned of our author's great unfairneſs and diſingenuity, particularly his groſs perverſions of ſeveral paſſages of ſcripture, and putting a meaning upon them contrary to the plain intention of the writers, with many other things which are fully detected and expoſed by his learned anſwerers. But what is wanting in reaſoning, is made up in confidence. He boldly pronounceth, that "the witneſſes "do not all agree in one circumſtance, but palpably contradict "one another in every particular; and that ſuch inconſiſtencies, "improbabilities, abſurdities, and contradictions, would deſtroy "the credit of other hiſtories;" but he ſneeringly adds, "that "the faith of this is founded on a rock†." And I believe it

* Chubb's poſthumous Works, vol. 1.

† Reſurrection of Jeſus conſidered, p. 56, 57, 58.

will

will hardly be thought too ſevere a cenſure to ſay, that any man who would treat any other hiſtorians as this writer hath treated the evangeliſts, and who would advance ſuch rules of judging concerning any other books whatſoever, as he ſeems to think fair with regard to theirs, would, inſtead of paſſing for a candid and judicious critic, be generally exploded as a malicious and impertinent caviller, that had betrayed a great defect of ſenſe, manners, or honeſty.

In my remarks on Mr. Woolſton's diſcourſes in the ſeventh letter, notice was taken of that grand objection, that our Lord ought to have appeared publicly to the chief prieſts and rulers of the Jews after his reſurrection. I ſhall not repeat what is there offered in anſwer to it; but ſhall only obſerve, that our author has endeavoured to ſtrengthen that objection by pretending, that Jeſus had actually engaged to do ſo: and that "not to appear "to the Jews when he had promiſed it, and put the truth of his "miſſion upon it, was a denying the truth of his miſſion, and a "falſifying his word*." Thus he repreſents it, as if the evangeliſts had ſaid, that Chriſt promiſed to appear publicly to the Jews, and particularly to their chief prieſts and rulers after his reſurrection. But this is entirely his own fiction: our Lord made no ſuch promiſe. He declared indeed, that a ſign, like that of the prophet Jonas, ſhould be given to *that evil and adulterous generation*, *i. e.* that ſufficient evidence ſhould be given to convince them of the truth of his reſurrection. And ſuch evidence there was given, if their minds had been open to conviction: and vaſt numbers of the Jews were actually convinced by it. But this writer carrieth it ſtill farther: he thinks Jeſus ſhould have ſhewn himſelf to the Jews as their deliverer from the Roman yoke, and as their temporal king, that he might prove that he was the Meſſiah, and fulfil the prophecies.

A reflection occurs to me on this occaſion, which you will allow me to mention: It relates to the ſeveral demands that have been made by theſe gentlemen with regard to the evidence, which they pretend ought to have been given to the Jews of our Saviour's reſurrection. The author of *Chriſtianity not founded on Argument* thinks, that Jeſus ought to have taken one turn in

* Reſurrection of Jeſus conſidered, p. 59. 61.

the

the market place in the preſence of all the people, and that "this "might have ſpared both the painful labours and lives of ſo "many holy vouchers*." Mr. Chubb inſiſts upon it, that when Chriſt was riſen, "he ſhould have repaired to the houſe of ſome "friend, and made it the place of his reſidence the time he ſtaid "upon earth, that ſo the reſt of his friends, and all others, might "know where to ſee him, and have acceſs to him†." And if he had done ſo, and been publicly viſited, and the people had gathered together in crowds, as might in that caſe have been expected, this muſt have awakened the jealouſy both of the Jewiſh chief prieſts and rulers, and of the Roman government, and might, in the temper the Jews were then in, have probably produced tumults and inſurrections, which would have brought a great ſtur upon Chriſtianity at its firſt appearance. And ſo undoubtedly theſe gentlemen would have had it: for, according to our author, if Jeſus had appeared publicly to the Jews after his reſurrection, this would not have been ſufficient, if he did not alſo head their armies. And then to be ſure this would have been inſiſted upon as a manifeſt proof, that the whole ſcheme of his religion was falſe, and a mere piece of carnal policy.

I cannot help thinking upon the whole, that after all the clamour that hath been raiſed againſt it, the evidence which was actually given of our Lord's reſurrection was the propereſt that could be given. His making a public perſonal appearance to the people of the Jews would have been on many accounts improper, and might probably have had bad conſequences. But beſides the evidence ariſing from the teſtimony of the ſoldiers, who had been ſet to watch the ſepulchre, which was well known to the chief prieſts, and, notwithſtanding all their precautions, had come to the knowledge of others too; beſides this, his appearing, in the manner he did, to a conſiderable number of perſons, who had been immediately acquainted with him, to whom he frequently ſhewed himſelf alive after his paſſion by many infallible proofs during the courſe of forty days; his aſcending afterwards into heaven in their ſight, and the effuſion of the Holy Ghoſt in his extraordinary miraculous gifts and powers, as he himſelf had

* Chriſtianity not founded on Argument, p. 68.

† Chubb's poſthumous Works, vol. 1.

promiſed,

promiſed, upon his diſciples, the authorized witneſſes of his reſurrection, which was done in the moſt public manner poſſible, before many thouſands of perſons of all nations, which were then aſſembled at Jeruſalem; all this, with the following divine atteſtations that were given them, to confirm their teſtimony wherever they went, preaching the goſpel for many years together, to which teſtimony they unalterably adhered, in oppoſition to the greateſt ſufferings and perſecutions to which it expoſed them; all this taken together furniſhed the moſt proper and convincing evidence, not only of Chriſt's reſurrection, but of his exaltation to glory. And accordingly we find in fact, that his reſurrection was accompanied with ſuch proof and evidence, as convinced many myriads (for ſo it ſhould be rendered) of the Jewiſh nation, and among them *great numbers of the prieſts*, Acts vi. 7. xxi. 20. and brought them over, contrary to all their prejudices, to acknowledge one that had been crucified by the heads of their own nation for their Meſſiah, their Saviour, and their Lord; and afterwards convinced vaſt numbers of the Gentiles, and gained them over to a religion the moſt oppoſite that could be imagined, not only to their prejudices and ſuperſtitions, but to their vices, and which expoſed its profeſſors to the moſt grievous reproaches, perſecutions, and ſufferings.

But to return to our author:—Whoſoever carefully conſiders and compares what he hath offered may eaſily perceive, that, whatever pretences he may make of demanding other and farther evidence of Chriſt's reſurrection than was given, no evidence that could have been given of it would have ſatisfied him. If Jeſus had ſhewn himſelf alive, not only to the Jewiſh rulers, but to every ſingle perſon of the Jewiſh nation, he would have been as far from believing it as he is now: for he intimates, that it would be neceſſary that Chriſt ſhould appear again in every age, and every country, and to every particular perſon; and that all the miracles ſhould be wrought over again*: And even this, upon his principles, would not be ſufficient; for he lets us know more than once, that in theſe caſes we are not to truſt our own eyeſight. He roundly aſſerteth, that "every miracle "is an abſurdity to common ſenſe and underſtanding, and con-

* Reſurrection of Jeſus conſidered, p. 62.

"trary

"trary to all the attributes of God*." And that "pretended facts, "which are contrary to nature, can have no natural evidence; "and that theſe facts cannot be admitted on any evidence, be- "cauſe they in their own nature exclude all evidence, and allow "of no poſſible proof†. This point he hath laboured for ſeve- ral pages together, where he ſtrongly aſſerteth (for I do not find that he bringeth any thing that can be properly called a proof), that miracles are impoſſible. And he had better have ſtuck en- tirely to this, ſince if he could but have proved it, he might have ſaved himſelf the trouble of writing the reſt of his book.

There is another extraordinary paſſage in this writer, which deſerves to have a particular notice taken of it. After having treated the account given by St. John of the piercing of Chriſt's ſide with a ſpear, and of which he himſelf was any eye-witneſs, as a fiction, for no other reaſon but becauſe the other evangeliſts do not mention it; he inſinuates, that if his ſide was not thus pierced, he might not *be really dead when he was put into the ſepulchre;* and then no wonder that *he roſe again*‡. Thus it comes out, that he doubteth even of the death of Jeſus, which neither Jews nor heathens ever doubted of. Was there ever a more obſtinate or unreaſonable incredulity? He might as well doubt, whether there ever was ſuch a perſon as Jeſus, or his apoſtles, or whether ever the Chriſtian religion was propagated in the world at all. And indeed if, as he affirms, the reſur- rection of Chriſt was *the moſt incredible ſtory that could be told;* and the evidence that was given for it was the *worſt evidence that could be given*§, he might have argued more plauſibly than he hath done in moſt other caſes, that it was impoſſible, as the caſe was circumſtanced, that ſuch a ſilly ſtory ſhould ever make its way into the world, either among Jews or Gentiles, conſidering the religion that was founded upon it was abſolutely contrary to their moſt prevailing prejudices, and had no worldly advantages on its ſide, but all the powers of the world engaged againſt it; that therefore it is abſurd to ſuppoſe that Chriſtianity made any progreſs at all in the firſt ages, though there is no fact of which we have fuller evidence. And then he would only have

* Reſurrection of Jeſus conſidered, p. 51, 52. † Ibid. p. 73, 74.
‡ Ibid. p. 50. § Ibid. p. 67.

one

one ſtep to advance farther, and which is indeed the natural conſequence of this, and that is, to doubt whether there is any ſuch thing as the religion of Jeſus, or any perſons in the world that now profeſs it.

I ſhall conclude my remarks upon this writer with obſerving, that the very variations among the evangeliſts, which he produceth as ſo many contradictions, do really confirm the truth of the main facts. What he ſeemeth to inſiſt upon is, that every one of them ſhould tell all the ſame facts, in the ſame order and manner, and with the ſame circumſtances, neither more nor leſs; and that no one of them ſhould mention any thing which is not related by all the reſt. And if they had done ſo, then no doubt this would have been improved as a plain argument, that the whole was a concerted fiction; and that to derive a credit to it, it was pretended to have been written and publiſhed by four different perſons at different times, whereas theſe four pretended hiſtorians were really but one hiſtorian, or, if they were different, they only tranſcribed one another. But as the caſe now ſtands with the evangeliſts, there is a harmony in the main facts, and in the ſubſtance of Chriſt's diſcourſes: and yet at the ſame time there is a conſiderable variety in the order and manner of their narration: ſuch a variety as plainly ſheweth theſe accounts to have been written by different hiſtorians, not copied from one another; and that they did not write by concert, in which caſe they would have been more careful to ſhun all appearance of contradiction. They write with an unaffected ſimplicity, and with a confidence of truth, as becometh thoſe that were fully aſſured of what they relate: each writeth what he knew beſt, or what he thought propereſt to take notice of: and yet notwithſtanding the ſeeming variations in the order of their narration, and that ſome facts, or circumſtances of facts, are taken notice of by ſome of them which are not mentioned by others, it will be found, if narrowly examined, that there is no contradiction between them, and that their accounts may be fairly reconciled. And it is to be hoped, that this author's attempt to expoſe their authority, however ill intended, will only tend to ſtrengthen it; ſince though his malice and prejudice are very apparent, and though it is plain that he came to examine their accounts, not with a calm, impartial, and diſpaſſionate temper of mind, but with a reſolution,

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if poſſible, to find out abſurdities and contradictions in them; yet he has not been able to make good the charge. It turns out, that they are perfectly conſiſtent, and that their ſeeming contradictions admit of a juſt reconciliation.

I have been carried farther than I at firſt intended in making obſervations upon this pamphlet, which gives a true ſample of the deiſtical ſpirit, and may be regarded as one of the boldeſt and openeſt attacks that was ever made upon that grand article of the Chriſtian faith, the reſurrection of our Lord Jeſus Chriſt. And I have been the larger and more particular in my remarks upon it, both becauſe of the importance of the ſubject, which concerneth the very foundation of our holy religion, and becauſe I thought it might be of uſe to take this occaſion to obviate ſome of the moſt plauſible objections that have been urged againſt it. And what hath been here offered may equally ſerve to take off the force of that part of Mr. Chubb's poſthumous works which relates to the ſame point, and which he hath very much laboured.

But though this letter may ſeem already to have exceeded its due bounds, it will be neceſſary, according to the method I have hitherto purſued, to take notice of the anſwers that were made to this book. Dr. Samuel Chandler, who had on ſome former occaſions appeared to great advantage in the defence of Chriſtianity, publiſhed on this occaſion a valuable treatiſe, intitled, *The Witneſſes of the Reſurrection of Jeſus re-examined, and their Teſtimony proved entirely conſiſtent*, London, 1744. It is divided into eight chapters. In the firſt, it is ſhewn, that the ſufferings and glory of Chriſt were foretold by the ancient prophets. In the ſecond, that Chriſt plainly foretold his own ſufferings and death, and reſurrection to his own diſciples. In the third, that he declared his death and reſurrection publicly to the Jews. In the fourth, it is proved, that the Jewiſh rulers and Phariſees procured a guard to be ſet on the ſepulchre of Jeſus; and a ſolid anſwer is returned to the author's objections againſt it. The fifth chapter relateth to the appearance of the angels to the ſoldiers; the propriety of which is vindicated againſt his exceptions. The ſixth chapter is concerning the appearances of the angels to the women after the reſurrection. The ſeventh treats of the ſeveral appearances of Chriſt to the women and to his diſciples; and this author's charge of inconſiſtencies in the evangelic accounts is diſtinctly

diſtinctly conſidered. In the eighth chapter, Dr. Chandler concludes with ſumming up the evidence for the reſurrection of Jeſus, which he hath done with great clearneſs and judgment.

About the ſame time there was another anſwer publiſhed by a learned and ingenious but anonymous author, which is intitled, *The Evidence of the Reſurrection cleared, in Anſwer to "The Reſurrection of Jeſus conſidered."* He follows the author of that pamphlet cloſely, and ſhews, that he groſsly miſrepreſents the arguments in the *Trial of the Witneſſes*, which he undertakes to anſwer, and that he uſes the evangeliſts ſtill worſe. The things which we have mentioned, as taken notice of by Dr. Chandler, are alſo conſidered by this writer: particularly it is clearly proved, that Chriſt foretold his death and reſurrection, both to his own diſciples and to the Jews: and the author's reaſoning and exceptions againſt the ſtory of ſetting the guard, and ſealing the ſtone, are ſhown to be vain and groundleſs. The accounts given by the evangeliſts of the appearances of the angels to the women, and of Chriſt to them and to the diſciples, are diſtinctly conſidered; and the ſeeming variations, which the author pretends to be ſo many contradictions, are accounted for, though in a way ſomewhat different from Dr. Chandler. The ſolutions of theſe difficulties propoſed by each of theſe learned writers, are very ingenious, and may ſuffice to obviate the charge of contradictions the author hath brought againſt the evangeliſts; but ſome of them are judged not to be quite ſo clear and natural, as thoſe afterwards given by Mr. Weſt. This anonymous writer concludes with a diſtinct examination of what the author of *The Reſurrection of Jeſus conſidered* had offered againſt miracles in general. He hath clearly and judiciouſly expoſed the weakneſs and fallacy of thoſe reaſonings, whereby that author pretendeth to prove, that miracles are impoſſible both in a phyſical and moral ſenſe; that they are contrary to God's immutability; that they are perfectly needleſs, and anſwer no valuable end at all; and that if they were once neceſſary, they would be always neceſſary. Beſides the two anſwers above-mentioned, there was another then publiſhed, which I have not ſeen, and of which therefore I cannot give a particular account, though from the character I have heard of it, as well as from the known abilities of the author, I make no doubt of its being well executed: it is intitled, *An Addreſs to Deiſts, being*

being a Proof of Revealed Religion from Miracles and Prophecies, in Anſwer to a Book intitled, "The Reſurrection of Jeſus conſidered, by John Jackſon, Rector of Roſſington, London, 8vo, 1744.

Some time after, there was another book publiſhed, which was alſo occaſioned by *The Reſurrection of Jeſus conſidered,* and which particularly engaged the attention of the public, both by its own excellence, and becauſe the author of it was a lay-man: it is intitled, *Obſervations on the Hiſtory and Reſurrection of Jeſus Chriſt,* by Gilbert Weſt, Eſquire, London, 1747. He very juſtly commends the two learned and ingenious anſwers above-mentioned, as containing a ſolid confutation of many objections againſt Chriſtianity advanced by the author of *The Reſurrection of Jeſus conſidered;* but declares himſelf not to have been ſo fully ſatisfied with the manner of their clearing the ſacred writers from the contradictions charged upon them. This put him upon examining the ſcriptures themſelves, and comparing the ſeveral accounts of the evangeliſts with each other, which he hath done with great exactneſs: and the reſult of his inquiries was, that by carefully diſtinguiſhing the different appearances and events recorded by the evangeliſts, ſeveral of which had been hitherto confounded, he hath happily removed the difficulties and inconſiſtencies charged upon them, and hath taken away the very foundation of the principal objections that have been ſo often repeated almoſt from the beginning of Chriſtianity to this day. I ſhall not enter upon the particulars of his ſcheme, which may be ſeen with great advantage in his book. I ſhall only obſerve, that he hath not made uſe of ſtrained and arbitrary ſuppoſitions, but ſuch as ſeem clearly to ariſe from the accounts of the evangeliſts, carefully conſidered and compared.

By comparing the ſeveral parts of the hiſtory together, he hath made it to appear, that the women came at different times to the ſepulchre, and in different companies, and not all at once, as many have ſuppoſed; that there were ſeveral diſtinct appearances of angels, of which he reckons three, beſides that to the Roman ſoldiers, *viz.* to the other Mary and Salome, to Mary Magdalene, to Joanna and others with her; that theſe ſeveral facts were reported to the apoſtles at different times, and by different perſons; that there were two diſtinct appearances of Chriſt to the women;

women; one of which was to Mary Magdalene alone, the other to the other Mary and Salome; that St. Peter was twice at the ſepulchre, once with St. John, after the firſt report by Mary Magdalene, concerning the body's not being found in the ſepulchre; the ſecond time after the report made by Joanna, and the women with her, of the appearing of the angels to them. He obſerves, that Chriſtian writers; dazzled by ſome few points of reſemblance, have confounded theſe different facts, and thereby given great advantage to the infidel: whereas, the facts being rightly diſtinguiſhed, all the objections againſt this part of the goſpel hiſtory, as contradictory and inconſiſtent, entirely vaniſh; and it appeareth, that the evangeliſts, inſtead of claſhing and diſagreeing, mutually confirm, illuſtrate, and ſupport each other's evidence.

This learned gentleman hath made excellent and judicious reflections upon the ſeveral incidents in the hiſtory of the reſurrection, and upon the order in which they happened, and in which the ſeveral proofs of the reſurrection were laid before the apoſtles. He ſhews, that the diſcovery of it which was made to them was wiſely ordered to be gradual; and that as they were to be the choſen witneſſes of the reſurrection of Jeſus, there was a great propriety in the ſeveral ſteps that were taken to give them the higheſt conviction of it. There is a train of witneſſes, a ſucceſſion of miraculous events, mutually ſtrengthening and illuſtrating each other, equally and jointly concurring to prove one and the ſame fact. And whereas their doubting and unbelief, ſpoken of by the evangeliſts, ſeem principally to have conſiſted in this, that though they might believe that Chriſt had appeared to thoſe who declared they had ſeen him, yet they did not believe that he had appeared to them with a real body, therefore, in condeſcenſion to their infirmity, he gave them the fulleſt evidence of the reality of his bodily appearance.

The proofs of Chriſt's reſurrection laid before the apoſtles are digeſted by Mr. Weſt under four heads. 1. The teſtimony of thoſe that had ſeen him after he was riſen. 2. The evidence of their own ſenſes. 3. The accompliſhment of the words he had ſpoken to them, while he was yet with them. 4. The fulfilling of the things which were written in the law of Moſes, and in the Prophets, and in the Pſalms, concerning him; of which Mr. Weſt hath given a judicious ſummary.

Upon recapitulating the ſeveral particulars which conſtitute the evidence of the reſurrection, he concludes, that never was there any fact more fully proved than the reſurrection of Jeſus Chriſt; and that thoſe who were appointed to be the witneſſes of it had every kind of proof that in the like circumſtances the moſt ſcrupulous could demand, or the moſt incredulous imagine.

Having conſidered the proofs of the reſurrection of Jeſus Chriſt, as they were laid before the apoſtles, he proceeds to conſider ſome of the arguments that may induce us, at this diſtance of time, to believe that Chriſt roſe from the dead; and theſe he reduceth to two principal heads: The teſtimony of the choſen witneſſes of the reſurrection recorded in the ſcriptures: and the exiſtence of the Chriſtian religion.

With regard to the former, he ſheweth, that the apoſtles and evangeliſts had the two qualities neceſſary to eſtabliſh the credit of a witneſs, a perfect knowlege of the facts he gives teſtimony to, and a fair unblemiſhed character; and that their teſtimony is tranſmitted down in writings either penned by themſelves, or authorized by their inſpection and approbation. He offereth ſeveral conſiderations to ſhew the genuineneſs of thoſe writings, and takes notice both of the internal marks of the veracity of the ſacred writers, obſervable in the ſcriptures, and of the external proofs of their veracity and inſpiration; eſpecially the exact accompliſhment of the prophecies recorded in thoſe writings. He inſtances in thoſe relating to the different ſtates of Jews and Gentiles, different not only from each other, but from that in which both were at the time when thoſe prophecies were written. He obſerves, that there are ſeveral particulars relating to the condition of the Jewiſh nation, which were moſt expreſsly foretold; as the deſtruction of the city and temple of Jeruſalem, and the ſigns preceding that deſtruction; the miſeries of the Jews before, at, and after the famous ſiege of that city; the general diſperſion of that people, the duration of their calamity, and their wonderful preſervation under it; and finally, their reſtoration. And ſince the other parts of theſe predictions have been exactly accompliſhed, there is great reaſon to think, the laſt will be ſo too in the proper ſeaſon.

He concludes the whole with the argument drawn from the preſent exiſtence of the Chriſtian religion; and ſheweth, that, without ſuppoſing the truth of Chriſt's reſurrection, there is no accounting

accounting for the propagation and preſent exiſtence of Chriſtianity in ſo many regions of the world. To ſet this in a proper light, he repreſenteth, in an elegant and ſtriking manner, the great difficulties this religion had to ſtruggle with at its firſt appearance, and the inabilities of its firſt preachers, humanly ſpeaking, to oppoſe and overcome thoſe obſtacles. They had the ſuperſtition and prejudices of the Jews to encounter with; and at the ſame time, religion, cuſtom, law, policy, pride, intereſt, vice, and even philoſophy, united the heathen world againſt Chriſtianity. Its oppoſers were poſſeſſed of all the wiſdom, power, and authority of the world: the preachers of it were weak and contemptible; yet it triumphed over all oppoſition. And this, as the caſe was circumſtanced, affordeth a manifeſt proof of a divine interpoſition, and of the truth of the extraordinary facts by which it was ſupported; the principal of which is the reſurrection of Jeſus Chriſt.

Thus have I endeavoured to give ſome idea of this excellent performance, and have been the more particular in my account of it, becauſe a work of this kind, done by a lay-man, is apt to be more taken notice of and received with leſs prejudice: and for the ſame reaſon, though it does not come ſo directly within my preſent deſign, I hope you will indulge me in giving ſome account of a ſhort, but juſtly admired, treatiſe which appeared ſoon after, and was alſo written by a learned lay-man, Sir George Littleton. It is intitled, *Obſervations on the Converſion and Apoſtleſhip of St. Paul, in a Letter to Gilbert Weſt, Eſquire*, London, 1747. The great advantage of this performance is, that the evidence for Chriſtianity is here drawn to one point of view, for the uſe of thoſe who will not attend to a long ſeries of argument. The deſign is to ſhew, that the converſion and apoſtleſhip of St. Paul, alone conſidered, is of itſelf a demonſtration ſufficient to prove Chriſtianity to be a divine revelation. This deſign is very happily executed. He firſt conſidereth the account St. Paul himſelf hath given of the miraculous manner of his converſion; and thence argueth, that it muſt of neceſſity be, that the perſon atteſting theſe things of himſelf either was an impoſtor, who ſaid what he knew to be falſe, with an intent to deceive; or he was an enthuſiaſt, who by the force of an over-heated imagination impoſed on himſelf; or he was deceived by the fraud of others;

or laſtly, what he declared to be the cauſe of his converſion, and to have happened in conſequence of it, did all really happen; and therefore the Chriſtian religion is a divine revelation. That he was not an impoſtor, he proves, by ſhewing, with admirable clearneſs and ſtrength, that he could have no rational motive to undertake ſuch an impoſture; nor could poſſibly have carried it on with any ſucceſs by the means we know he employed. With equal evidence he ſheweth that St. Paul was not an enthuſiaſt; that he had not thoſe diſpoſitions which are eſſential ingredients in that character; and that he could not poſſibly have impoſed on himſelf by any power of enthuſiaſm, either with regard to the miracle that cauſed his converſion, or to the conſequential effects of it, or to ſome other circumſtances which he bears teſtimony to in his Epiſtles; eſpecially the miracles wrought by him, and the extraordinary gifts conferred upon him, and upon the Chriſtian converts to whom he wrote. To ſuppoſe all this to have been only owing to the ſtrength of his own imagination, when there was in reality no ſuch thing at all, is to ſuppoſe him to have been all this time quite out of his ſenſes: and then it is abſolutely impoſſible to account, how ſuch a diſtempered enthuſiaſt and madman could make ſuch a progreſs, as we know he did, in converting the Gentile world. He next proceeds to ſhew, that St. Paul was not deceived by the fraud of others; if the diſciples of Chriſt could have conceived ſo ſtrange a thought as that of turning his perſecutor into his apoſtle, they could not poſſibly have effected it in the manner in which it was effected, with the extraordinary conſequences that followed upon it. It is evident then, that what he ſaid of himſelf could not be imputed to the deceit of others, no more than to wilful impoſture, or enthuſiaſm: and then it followeth, that what he relateth to have been the cauſe of his converſion, and to have happened in conſequence of it, did all really happen, and therefore the Chriſtian religion is a divine revelation. He concludeth with ſome good obſervations to ſhew, that the myſteries of the Chriſtian religion do not furniſh any juſt reaſon for rejecting the ſtrong and convincing evidence with which it is attended: that there are ſeveral incomprehenſible difficulties in deiſm itſelf; ſuch as thoſe relating to the origin of moral evil, the reconciling the preſcience of God with the free-will of man, which Mr. Locke owns he could not

not do, though he acknowledged both, the creation of the world in time, or the eternal production of it. And yet no wise man, because of these difficulties, would deny the being, the attributes, or the providence of God.

But it is time to conclude this long epistle; and here I intended, as you know, to have closed my accounts of the deistical writers. But as you insist upon it, that, in order to complete this design, it will be necessary to take a more particular notice than I have done of Mr. Chubb's *Posthumous Works*, this will engage me to continue my correspondence on this head for some time longer.

LETTER XIII.

An Account of Mr. Chubb's Poſthumous Works; *his ſpecious Profeſſions, and the advantageous Character he gives of his own Writings—He doth not allow a particular Providence, or that Prayer to God is a Duty—His Uncertainty and Inconſiſtency with Reſpect to a future State of Exiſtence, and a future Judgment—He abſolutely rejects the Jewiſh Revelation—His Objections againſt it briefly obviated—He expreſſes a good Opinion of Mahometaniſm, and will not allow that it was propagated by the Sword—He ſeems to acknowledge Chriſt's divine Miſſion, and ſometimes gives a favourable Account of Chriſtianity; but it is ſhewn, that he hath done all he can to weaken and expoſe it, and to ſubvert its Credit and divine Authority.*

AMONG the deiſtical writers of this preſent age, Mr. Chubb made no inconſiderable figure. He was, though not a man of learning, regarded by many as a perſon of ſtrong natural parts and acuteneſs, and who had a clear manner of expreſſion. He was the author of a great number of tracts, in ſome of which he put on the appearance of a friend to Chriſtianity; though it was no difficult matter to diſcern that his true intention was to betray it. One of the moſt remarkable of theſe tracts was his *True Goſpel of Jeſus Chriſt aſſerted;* in which, under pretence of aſſerting the goſpel of Chriſt in its genuine ſimplicity, he really endeavoured to ſubvert and expoſe it. This was anſwered by Mr. Joſeph Hallet, in a valuable tract, intitled, *The conſiſtent Chriſtian; being a Confutation of the Errors advanced in Mr. Chubb's Book, intitled,* "*The true Goſpel of Jeſus Chriſt aſſerted, relating to the Neceſſity of Faith, the Nature of the Goſpel, the Inſpiration of the Apoſtles, &c.*" *with Remarks on his Diſſertation on Providence:* 8vo. 1738. Another noted tract of Mr. Chubb's was, his *Diſcourſe on Miracles,* in which he propoſed to give a repreſentation of the various reaſonings that relate to the ſubject of miracles. But it is manifeſt, that his intention was not to clear but to perplex the ſubject; and to ſhew, that the

proof

proof from miracles is not at all to be depended upon. To this there was a ſolid and full anſwer returned by Mr. Abraham Le Moine, which was publiſhed at London, 8vo, 1747. Several of Mr. Chubb's tracts were alſo anſwered by Mr. Caleb Fleming; but his anſwers I have not ſeen. What I propoſe to conſider are thoſe that are called his *Poſthumous Works*, ſome of which were printed in his own life-time, and the reſt carefully corrected and prepared by himſelf for the preſs, and publiſhed after his death, in two volumes, 8vo, London, 1748. The firſt volume begins with a ſhort tract, intitled, *Remarks on the Scriptures*. But the far greater part of this volume, and the entire ſecond volume, is taken up with what is called "*The Author's Farewell to his* "*Readers*, comprehending a variety of Tracts on the moſt im- "portant ſubjects of religion." It is divided into eleven large ſections; and the principal deſign he appears to have had in view is, to deſtroy, as far as in him lay, the credit and authority of the Chriſtian revelation. I know of no anſwer that has been publiſhed to this book, and therefore ſhall be more particular in my remarks upon it, to obviate in ſome meaſure the miſchief it is fitted to produce.

It is plain from ſeveral hints which he hath given us, that he looked upon himſelf to be a writer of no ſmall importance. He declares, that he hath treated the ſeveral ſubjects he has *diſcuſſed* with *plainneſs and freedom*, and *of courſe muſt have miniſtered to the pleaſure of the intelligent part of mankind*, whether they *approved his ſentiments, or not**. He begins the firſt ſection of what he calls his *Farewell to his Readers*, with expreſſing his hope, that his "correſpondence with them by writing for many "years paſt, has been not altogether uſeleſs nor unacceptable to "them†." And in the laſt ſection of his *Farewell*, which he calls his *Concluſion*, he expreſſeth himſelf as one that in theſe his laſt writings was leaving a very valuable legacy to the world. I know few authors, who have taken leave of their readers with a greater air of ſolemnity than he has done. He calls God to witneſs to the goodneſs of his intentions; and declares, that in what he has offered to the world, he has "appealed to the underſtand- "ing, and not to the paſſions of men‡": That "with ſincerity

* Chubb's poſthumous Works, vol. i. p. 64, 65. † Ibid. p. 97.
‡ Ibid. vol. ii. p. 354, 355.

" and truth he can ſay, he has had a real concern and regard to " the preſent well-being of his fellow-creatures, as well as to their " future happineſs:" And that as he was " in the decline of " life, and perhaps not far from the concluſion of it, and being " in the full exerciſe of his intellectual faculties, which are not " in the leaſt clouded or impaired, he choſe to take his leave of " the world as a writer, hoping, that what he has offered to public " conſideration has had, and may have, ſome good effect upon " the minds and lives of his readers*." And he concludes the whole with again aſſuring his readers, that he has laid before them, in the *plaineſt manner* he was able, both in this diſcourſe, and in what he had before publiſhed to the world, *thoſe truths* which he thought to be of *the higheſt importance*. And ſo, ſaith he, " I bid you farewell, hoping to be a ſharer with you of the " divine favour, in that peaceful and happy ſtate, which God " hath prepared for the virtuous and faithful, in ſome other fu- " ture world."

Who that conſiders theſe ſolemn profeſſions, would be apt to ſuſpect, that this very author, in theſe his farewell diſcourſes, has not only uſed his utmoſt efforts to expoſe Chriſtianity and the holy Scriptures, but has endeavoured to weaken ſome of the moſt important principles of natural religion?

He had, in one of his tracts formerly publiſhed, ſhewn himſelf to be no friend to the doctrine of a particular providence; and there are ſeveral paſſages in his *Poſthumous Works*, which look that way. He plainly intimates, that he looks upon God as having nothing now to do with the good or evil that is done among mankind†; and that men's natural abilities or endowments of body or mind, their fortunes, ſituation in the world, and other circumſtances or advantages by which one man is diſtinguiſhed from another, are things that entirely depend upon ſecond cauſes, and in which providence does not interpoſe at all‡. And when he endeavours to ſhew, that no proof can be brought for a future ſtate from the preſent unequal diſtribution of things, his argument amounteth in effect to this, that providence hath nothing to do with theſe preſent inequalities, nor concerneth itſelf with ſome men's being in a proſperous condition or circum-

* Chubb's poſthumous Works, vol. ii. p. 357. 359. 361.
† Ibid. vol. i. p. 127. ‡ Ibid. p. 225.

ſtances,

ſtances, and others in a calamitous or ſuffering ſtate*. He evidently ſuppoſeth all along, that God doth not interpoſe in any thing where ſecond cauſes are concerned†: So that all agency of divine providence in diſpoſing, governing, and overruling ſecond cauſes, in which ſo much of the wiſdom of God's providential adminiſtrations doth conſiſt, is upon his ſcheme abſolutely excluded.

Agreeably to this, he diſcardeth all hope or expectation of divine aſſiſtance in the practice of that which is good; though he owns, that ſomething of this kind hath been generally believed in all religions. This is the deſign of a conſiderable part of the firſt ſection of his *Farewell to his Readers*‡; which would deſerve to be particularly examined, if this were a proper place for it. I ſhall only obſerve, that what he ſeems to lay a principal ſtreſs upon, to ſet aſide the notion of divine influences or aſſiſtances, is, that we have no way of certainly diſtinguiſhing them from the operations of our own minds; whereas, ſuppoſing this to be the caſe, all that it would prove is, not that there are no gracious aſſiſtances or influences communicated at all, but that they are ordinarily communicated in a way perfectly agreeable to the juſt order of our faculties, and without putting any unnatural conſtraint upon them.

And as he allows no particular interpoſition of divine providence in human affairs, it is not to be wondered at, that he has done what he can to ſhew, that prayer to God is no part of natural religion§. He ſuppoſes it as a thing certain, that God doth not fulfil our requeſts by granting what we pray for, ſince things will go on in their natural courſe, whether we pray to God or not. He owns indeed, that prayer, conſidered as a *poſitive inſtitution*, may be of uſe, by *introducing proper reflections, and thereby proper affections and actions*; and provided it be made uſe of only for this purpoſe, without expecting to obtain any thing from God in conſequence of it, he thinks it cannot be ſaid to be a *mocking of God*: but yet he apprehends that even in this

* Chubb's poſthumous Works, vol. i. p. 394, 395.

† See concerning a particular providence, Woolaſton's Religion of Nature delineated, p. 98, & ſeq.

‡ Chubb's poſthumous Works, vol. i. p. 114, & ſeq. § Ibid. p. 287, &c.

caſe,

caſe, there is ſtill an impropriety in it, and puts the queſtion, whether ſuch an impropriety ſhould be *a bar to prayer*, or whether it be *diſpleaſing to God*; and he plainly intimates, that in his opinion it is ſo*. I need not take particular notice of the objections he hath urged againſt the duty of prayer, which have been often ſufficiently obviated†; but I think it is evident, that there is little room left, upon this author's ſcheme, for what hath been hitherto looked upon by the wiſeſt and beſt of men to be a principal part of true piety, or of the duty we owe to God, *viz.* a conſtant religious dependence upon his wiſe and good providence, a thankful ſenſe of his goodneſs, and gratitude to him for the benefits we receive, a patient ſubmiſſion and reſignation to his will under afflictions, an ingenuous truſt and affiance in him, and a looking up to him for his gracious aſſiſtances to help our ſincere endeavours.

The doctrines concerning the immortality of the ſoul, and a future ſtate of retributions, are juſtly regarded as important parts of natural religion, and have been acknowledged to be ſo by ſome of the deiſts themſelves. Mr. Blount, in a letter to the right honourable and moſt ingenious Strephon, in the *Oracles of Reaſon*, ſays, "There are many arguments from reaſon and philoſophy to prove the immortality of the ſoul, together with its "rewards and puniſhments; but that there is no argument of "greater weight with him, than the abſolute neceſſity and convenience that it ſhould be ſo, as well to complete the juſtice "of God, as to perfect the happineſs of man, not only in this "world, but in that which is to come." Another deiſtical writer obſerves, that "to ſay, man's ſoul dies with the body, is a "deſperate concluſion, which ſaps the foundation of human "happineſs‡." And one would think, by ſome paſſages in Mr. Chubb's book, that he was of the ſame opinion. He begins the firſt ſection of his *Farewell* with aſſuring his readers, that what he hath *principally aimed at in all his writings*, has been both to *evince*, and *to impreſs deeply upon their minds*, a juſt ſenſe of thoſe truths, which are of the higheſt concern to them: and one

* Chubb's poſthumous Works, p. 283, 284.

† See particularly Religion of Nature delineated, p. 125, 126. and eſpecially Benſon's ingenious tract On the End and Deſign of Prayer.

‡ Letter to the Deiſts, p. 25. cited by Halyburton.

of

of thoſe truths which he there expreſsly mentions is this, "that "God will reward or puniſh men in another world, according "as they have by their good or bad behaviour, rendered them-"ſelves the proper objects of either in this *." He repeats this again in very ſtrong expreſſions at the end of his tenth ſection, where he propoſes to ſet before the reader, the *ſum total*, as he expreſſeth it, of his principles †: and again, in what he calls his concluſion, he ſpeaks of God's calling our ſpecies to an account for their practice and behaviour, "at which tribunal," ſaith he, "he will moſt certainly deal with me, and the reſt of mankind, "in juſtice and equity, according to the truth and reality of our "reſpective caſes." And in the very laſt words of his *Farewell to his Readers*, which I cited before, he declares his hope "to "be a ſharer with them of the divine favour in that peaceful and "happy ſtate, which God had prepared for the virtuous and "faithful, in ſome other future world ‡."

And yet, notwithſtanding theſe expreſs and repeated declarations concerning a future ſtate of exiſtence, and a future judgment and retribution, he hath taken pains to unſettle the minds of men in theſe important points.

In his fourth ſection, in which he profeſſedly inquireth concerning a future ſtate of exiſtence to men, he repreſenteth it as abſolutely doubtful, whether the ſoul be material or immaterial; whether it be diſtinct from the body; and, if it be, whether it is equally periſhable as the body, and ſhall die with it, or ſhall ſubſiſt after the diſſolution of the body. Theſe are points which, he ſays, he cannot poſſibly determine, becauſe he has nothing to ground ſuch determination upon; and at the ſame time he declareth, that "if the ſoul be periſhable with the body, there can "ſurely be no place for argument with regard to a future ſtate "of exiſtence to men, or a future retribution, becauſe when the "human frame is once diſſolved by death, then man ceaſes to "be, and is no more §." In what follows, he declares himſelf quite unſatisfied with the arguments which are brought to prove, that the ſoul is not material, or that matter is not capable of in-

* Chubb's poſthumous Works, vol. i. p. 97, 99.
† Ibid. vol. ii. p. 348, 349. ‡ Ibid. p. 355.
§ Ibid. vol. i. p. 312, 313.

telligence;

telligence; and though he doth not take upon him expreſsly to determine that point, it is eaſy to ſee that he inclineth moſt to the materialiſts*: and after having declared, that the philoſophical arguments and reaſonings on this head are too abſtract and ſubtle for him to underſtand, and that therefore he cannot form any judgment about them, nor draw any concluſion from them, he adds, that divine revelation does not afford a proper ground of certainty with reſpect to man's future exiſtence, becauſe we cannot come to any certainty with regard to the divine original of any external revelation†. He finds fault with St. Paul for ſaying, that *life and immortality are brought to light by the goſpel*, and will not allow that the reſurrection of Chriſt, ſuppoſing it true, though he takes a great deal of pains to ſhew that it is not ſo, proves either the poſſibility or certainty of a reſurrection and a future ſtate‡. Thus it appears; that, in this ſection, where he profeſſedly treateth of a future ſtate of exiſtence to men, he does all he can to render it abſolutely uncertain, and to ſhew that no proof can be given of it, either from reaſon or revelation: and yet, that he may make a ſhew of ſaying ſomething, he concludes this ſection with obſerving, that from man's being an accountable creature, there ariſes a probability, that there will be a future ſtate of exiſtence to men: the farther conſideration of which he reſerves for the following ſection, which is concerning a future judgment and retribution.

In this therefore, which is his fifth ſection, the reader might perhaps expect ſome determination of this point; and yet, though this is a pretty long ſection, the proper ſubject of which is the future judgment, it is managed in ſuch a manner, as to leave the reader at an uncertainty about it, and as much at a loſs as before. He begins indeed with obſerving, that "man, by his faculties and endowments, is an accountable creature, accountable for his behaviour to all whom it may concern, namely, to the intelligent world, and alſo to the Deity, who is the moſt perfect intelligence§." But he abſolutely diſcards the proof that is drawn from the preſent unequal diſtributions of divine providence. This argument he ſtates very unfairly, and endea-

* Chubb's poſthumous Works, vol. i. p. 317, 318. 324. 326.
† Ibid. p. 327, 328. ‡ Ibid. p. 333, & ſeq. § Ibid. p. 387.

vours

yours to place it in a ridiculous light. He compares men's different conditions here on earth to that of horſes, ſome of whom meet with bad maſters, and others happen to have good ones; and pretends, the argument would equally conclude for a future retribution with regard to all other animals, as it does for the ſpecies of mankind*: but, admitting there will be a future retribution, he thinks it may be doubted, whether it ſhall be univerſally extended to all our ſpecies. He plainly intimates, that, in his opinion, thoſe who die in their youth will not be called into judgment, nor thoſe who act a very low part in life; and he ſeems to think, that thoſe only ſhall be called to an account whoſe lives have been of much greater conſequence to the world, and who have been greatly ſubſervient to the public good, or hurt, of mankind†: So that, according to his repreſentation of the caſe, ſuppoſing there were to be a future judgment and retribution, it is what the generality of mankind would have little concern in. And as, upon his ſcheme, there are but few who ſhall be called to an account, ſo it is but for ſome particular actions that they ſhall be accountable. He obſerves, that no man ever intended to do diſhonour to God, or to be injurious to him, however fooliſhly they may have uſed the names or terms by which the Deity is characterized; and that therefore there will be no inquiry at the laſt judgment about ſuch offences as theſe; *i. e.* about blaſphemies againſt God. The only offence man can be guilty of againſt God is, he thinks, the want of a juſt ſenſe of his kindneſs and beneficence, and the not making a public profeſſion of gratitude to him: but whether this will make a part of the grand inqueſt, he declares himſelf certainly unable to judge; and he plainly inſinuates, that in his opinion it will not; ſince "among men it has been looked upon to be a mark of greatneſs "of ſoul, rather to deſpiſe and overlook ſuch ingratitude, than "to ſhew any reſentment of it‡." The only thing, therefore, for which he ſuppoſes men ſhall be accountable, is for the injuries or benefits they do to one another: and even as to theſe, he ſeems not to allow, that the good or evil particular perſons do to one another, will come into judgment, but only "the good or

* Chubb's poſthumous Works, vol. i. p. 395. † Ibid. p. 400.
‡ Ibid. p. 391, 392.

"bad

"bad part men act, by voluntarily contributing to the good or hurt "of the commonweal*." He afterwards ſetteth himſelf to ſhew, that things would be as well ordered in the world without the ſuppoſition and expectation of a future judgment, as with it; that men's duties and obligations would ſtill be the ſame, and ſo would the motives to adhere to virtue, and to avoid vice: nor is the belief of it of any great advantage to ſociety†. To all which it may be added, that here again, in treating concerning a future judgment, he takes care to repeat what he had ſaid in the foregoing ſection, *viz.* that if the ſoul be periſhable, and is diſſolved with the body, then this world ſeems to be *man's all*, and that on ſuch a ſuppoſition, a *reſurrection* or *reſtoration*, and a *future retribution*, ſeem to be excluded: and at the ſame time he declareth, that whether the ſoul periſheth with the body or not, is a thing which admitteth of no proof‡. So that, upon the whole, he really leaveth it as a matter quite uncertain, whether there ſhall be a future judgment or not; and yet, when he has a mind to make a boaſt of the good tendency of his principles, he is for making a merit of it, that it is one of thoſe important truths, which he has taken pains to inculcate on the minds of men.

I have inſiſted the longer upon theſe things, that I may unmaſk the fair pretences of this author, who ſets up for an uncommon degree of openneſs and candour. His admirers may hence ſee how conſiſtent he is, and how far his profeſſions are to be depended on.

I ſhall now conſider what he hath offered in this his ſolemn *Farewell to his Readers*, with regard to revealed religion.

As to revelation in general, he ſeems to make a very fair conceſſion. "When men (ſaith he) are ſunk into groſs ignorance and error, and are greatly vitiated in their affections and "actions, then God may, for any reaſon I can ſee to the contrary, kindly interpoſe, by a ſpecial application of his power "and providence, and reveal to men ſuch uſeful truths as otherwiſe they might be ignorant of, or might not attend to; and alſo "lay before them ſuch rules of life as they ought to walk by; "and likewiſe preſs their obedience with proper motives, and

* Chubb's poſthumous Works, vol. i. p. 395-397.
† Ibid. p. 401. 410.
‡ Ibid. p. 399.
§ Ibid. p. 292, 293.

"thereby

"thereby lead them to repentance and reformation*." But, as if he was afraid that in this he had made too large a conceſſion, he adds, "but then that it is ſo, and when it is ſo, will in the "nature of the thing be matter of doubt and diſputation." And in his ſixth ſection, where he treateth expreſsly of revelation, he aſſerteth, that, in what way ſoever God communicateth knowledge to men, "it muſt be a matter of uncertainty, whether the reve-"lation be divine or not, becauſe we have no rule to judge, or "from which we can with certainty diſtinguiſh divine revelation "from deluſion:" and that if this be the caſe with thoſe who receive the revelation at firſt hand, then ſurely it muſt be uncertain to thoſe who receive it from them†. Thus, though he ſeems to grant, that God may on ſome occaſions *kindly interpoſe, by a ſpecial application of his power and providence*, to reveal to men uſeful truths, and to direct and excite them to their duty; yet he will not allow that he can communicate the knowledge of his will in ſuch a way, as to give them a ſufficient ſatisfying aſſurance that it is a divine revelation, and came from him. This is a moſt preſumptuous and unreaſonable limitation of the divine power and wiſdom, and is in effect the ſame thing as to ſay, that he cannot communicate any revelation of his will to mankind at all; even though his goodneſs ſhould diſpoſe him to do ſo, and their circumſtances ſhould require it. Dr. Tindal had in effect ſaid the ſame thing with our author; and what he offered to this purpoſe was fully conſidered and obviated in the anſwers that were made to him‡.

From the queſtion concerning revelation in general, Mr. Chubb proceeds, in his ſixth ſection, to make ſome obſervations on the Jewiſh, Mahometan, and Chriſtian revelation in particular.

The firſt of theſe he abſolutely rejecteth. He pretends, that God's moral character is ſullied by it; that St. Peter and St. Paul condemn it as unworthy of the Deity; that it had a vaſt multiplicity of rites and ceremonies, which he ſuppoſes to be perfectly arbitrary, and inſtituted without any reaſon at all: that it repreſents God as acting partially, in chooſing the Jewiſh nation to be

* Chubb's poſthumous Works, vol. i. p. 292, 293. † Ibid. vol. ii. p. 5.

‡ See Conybeare's Defence of Revealed Religion, chap. vii. Anſwer to Chriſtianity as old as the Creation, vol. ii. chap. 1.

a peculiar

a peculiar people: and that, in that conſtitution, a twelfth part of the people lived idly on the labour of the reſt: that the appearances of God to the patriarchs, to Moſes, &c. could only belong to a local circumſcribed deity: and that the God of Iſrael was not the ſupreme Being, but only ſome tutelar ſubordinate god, conſonant to the pagan idolatry: and that his conduct in ordering the Iſraelites to extirpate the Canaanites was inconſiſtent with the moral character of the Deity. This is the ſum of what he urges, for ſeveral pages together in his ſixth ſection, with regard to the Jewiſh revelation*. And he had inſiſted upon the ſame things before at greater length in his ſecond ſection†, where he alſo condemns the puniſhing idolatry with death under the Jewiſh conſtitution as unjuſt, and as tending to juſtify perſecution for conſcience ſake. Theſe, and other objections to the ſame purpoſe, had been urged with great vivacity by Dr. Morgan, in his *Moral Philoſopher*, and were fully conſidered and obviated in the firſt and ſecond volumes of *The divine Authority of the Old and New Teſtament aſſerted.* Mr. Chubb has thought fit to repeat the objections, without giving any new ſtrength to them that I can find, or taking off the force of the anſwers which had been returned.

Referring therefore to what I have more largely inſiſted upon in the books now mentioned, I ſhall at preſent only obſerve in brief, that the idea given of God in the Jewiſh ſcriptures, of his greatneſs and majeſty, of his power and wiſdom, of his juſtice, goodneſs, and purity, and of his univerſal preſence and dominion, is the nobleſt that can be conceived by the human mind, and the moſt fitted to produce holy affections and diſpoſitions towards him: That nothing can be more evident, than that the God propoſed to the Jews, as the proper object of their worſhip, is the one living and true God, the ſovereign Lord of the univerſe, who created all things by his power, who preſerveth and governeth all things by his providence: That as to the divine appearances mentioned in the Old Teſtament, no argument can be brought to prove, that the ſovereign Lord of the univerſe may not ſee fit on ſome occaſions to exhibit himſelf by a viſible ex-

* Chubb's poſthumous Works, vol. ii. p. 19—29.

† Ibid. vol. i. p. 189—231.

ternal

ternal glory and ſplendour, in order to ſtrike men with a more ſtrong and lively ſenſe of his immediate preſence; or that he may not in that caſe make uſe of a glorious ſubordinate being or beings of an order ſuperior to man; and ſome ſuch beings have been acknowledged by the beſt and wiſeſt men in all ages, in delivering meſſages in his name: That it is no way inconſiſtent with God's univerſal care and providence towards mankind, to make extraordinary diſcoveries of his will to particular perſons, or to a people, or to give them wiſe and excellent laws, and eſtabliſh a conſtitution among them, the fundamental principle of which is the acknowledgment and adoration of the one living and true God, in oppoſition to all idolatry. Nor is there the leaſt ſhadow of reaſon to prove, that he could not in ſuch a caſe make the obſervance of this the principal condition on which the national privileges and benefits he thought fit to confer upon that people ſhould be ſuſpended; in which caſe, whoſoever was guilty of idolatry under that peculiar conſtitution, was juſtly obnoxious to the penalties inflicted upon the enemies and ſubverters of the community. That as to God's chooſing the people of Iſrael, they not only proceeded from anceſtors, eminent for piety and virtue, and pure adorers of the Deity, but may be juſtly ſuppoſed, at the time of God's erecting that ſacred polity among them, to have been, notwithſtanding all their faults, freer from idolatry and other vices than any of the neighbouring nations. They ſeem to have been much better than the people of Egypt, from whence they were delivered; or than the Canaanites, whoſe land was given them, and who appear to have been a moſt wicked and abandoned race of men, univerſally guilty, not only of the groſſeſt idolatries, but of the moſt monſtrous vices and abominations of all kinds. And if God ſaw fit on that occaſion to order them to be extirpated, as a monument to all ages of his juſt deteſtation of ſuch crimes and vices, this cannot be proved to be inconſiſtent with the character of the wiſe and righteous governor of the world: though our author repreſents this as a milſtone that hangs at the neck of the Moſaic diſpenſation. With reſpect to the laws that were given to the people of Iſrael, thoſe of a moral nature, of which there is a comprehenſive ſummary in the Ten Commandments, are unqueſtionably holy and excellent; the judicial laws are wiſe and equitable; and the poſitive precepts, though many

many and various, wiſely ſuited to the ſtate and circumſtances of that time and people. The reaſons of ſeveral of them may be aſſigned even at this diſtance; and that there were very proper reaſons for the reſt may be juſtly ſuppoſed. And St. Peter and St. Paul, even when they repreſent them as burdenſome, plainly ſhew, that they look upon them to have been originally inſtituted for wiſe ends, though no longer to be obſerved, when a more perfect diſpenſation was introduced, to which they were deſigned to be ſubſervient. The appointing the Prieſts and Levites, and diſtributing them among the other tribes, is ſo far from being a juſt objection againſt that conſtitution, that it may be juſtly regarded as a wiſe and excellent inſtitution, well fitted for preſerving and ſpreading the knowledge of religion, and the law among the people, and inſtructing them in their duty; and the proviſion made for them was juſtly due, both as a reward for their ſervice, and as an equivalent for their not having had a diſtinct portion and ſhare of the land aſſigned them with the other tribes. Finally, the Moſaic conſtitution was attended at its firſt eſtabliſhment with the moſt glorious and amazing demonſtrations of a divine power and majeſty, and which plainly ſhewed an extraordinary divine interpoſition: and theſe facts were done not in ſecret, but in the moſt open public manner, of which the whole nation were witneſſes; and the memory of them conſtantly preſerved, both by ſolemn public memorials, and in authentic records, which have all the characters of genuine antiquity, ſimplicity, and a ſincere regard to truth, and have been always regarded by the whole nation with the profoundeſt veneration. Nor is there any juſt foundation for the author's pretence, that the ſacred hiſtory was entirely in the hands of the prieſts, or that from Solomon's time to the Babyloniſh captivity none had acceſs to it but the high-prieſt, and that in that captivity their law was entirely deſtroyed and loſt*; a ſuppoſition that has been frequently repeated by the deiſtical writers, though the abſurdity of it has been fully expoſed.

Though Mr. Chubb hath abſolutely rejected the Jewiſh revelation, he ſpeaks very favourably of that of Mahomet†. Among other inſtances of his regard to it, he takes upon him to pronounce,

* Chubb's poſthumous Works, vol. ii. p. 26, 27. † Ibid. p. 30, &c.

that

that " it cannot ſurely be true, that the great prevalence of Ma-
" hometaniſm was owing to its being propagated by the ſword;
" becauſe it muſt have prevailed to a very great degree before
" the ſword could have been drawn in its favour." And yet it is a thing capable of the cleareſt proof, that Mahometaniſm from its firſt appearance was propagated by the ſword. This was what Mahomet himſelf moſt expreſsly required and recommended; and he accordingly ſpread his religion conſiderably by force of arms in his life-time; and immediately after his death, the chief apoſtles of Mahometaniſm were captains and mighty generals, who ſpread their conqueſts far and wide. Our author concludes his account of Mahometaniſm with ſaying, " whether the Ma-
" hometan revelation be of a divine original, or not, there ſeems
" to be a plauſible pretence, ariſing from the circumſtances of
" things, for ſtamping a divine character upon it*.

As to the Chriſtian revelation, it is evident he has done all in his power to expoſe it; and yet he ſeems plainly to acknowledge Chriſt's divine miſſion. " That there was ſuch a perſon as Jeſus
" Chriſt, and that he, in the main, did and taught as is recorded
" of him, appears (ſaith he) to be probable, becauſe it is impro-
" bable that Chriſtianity ſhould take place in the way and to the
" degree it did, or at leaſt that we are told it did, ſuppoſing the
" hiſtory of Chriſt's life and miniſtry to be a fiction." He adds, that " if ſuch power attended Jeſus Chriſt in the exerciſe of his
" miniſtry, as the hiſtory ſets forth, then ſeeing his miniſtry and
" the power that attended it ſeems, at leaſt in general, to have
" terminated in the public good, it is more likely that God was
" the primary agent in the exerciſe of that power, than any other
" inviſible being. And then it is probable, that Jeſus Chriſt,
" upon whoſe will the immediate exerciſe of that power de-
" pended, would not uſe that power to impoſe upon and miſlead
" mankind to their hurt, ſeeing that power appears to have been
" well directed and applied in other reſpects, and ſeeing he was
" accountable to his principal for the abuſe of it." He adds—
" from theſe premiſes, or from this general view of the caſe, I
" think this concluſion follows, *viz.* it is probable Chriſt's miſ-
" ſion was divine; at leaſt it appears ſo to me from the light or

* Chubb's poſthumous Works, vol. ii. p. 40.

"information I have received concerning it*." And as he ſeems here to acknowledge Chriſt's miſſion to be divine, ſo he undertakes to give an account what was the ſubject of his miſſion, or what it was that he was ſent to publiſh to the world. This he reduceth to three main principles, for which he referreth to a tract he had formerly publiſhed, intitled, *The true Goſpel of Chriſt*, viz. 1. That nothing but a conformity of mind and life to the eternal rule of righteouſneſs will render men acceptable to God. 2. That when men have deviated from that rule, nothing but a thorough repentance and reformation will render them the proper objects of God's mercy. And laſtly, that God will judge the world in righteouſneſs, and will render to every man according as his works ſhall be. He adds, that theſe propoſitions ſeem to him to contain the ſum and ſubſtance of Chriſt's miniſtry: and as they are altogether worthy of the Deity, ſo, he thinks, they may with propriety and truth be called, *the Goſpel of Jeſus Chriſt*. This is what he declares in his ſecond volume, p. 82, 83.; and he had ſaid the ſame thing before, vol. i. p. 98, 99, where he obſerves, that "theſe things contain the ſubſtance of what Chriſt "was in a ſpecial manner ſent of God to acquaint the world with." And again he declares, that by Chriſtianity he means, "that re"velation of God's will which Chriſt was in a ſpecial and particu"lar manner ſent to acquaint the world with; and as far as the "writings of the apoſtles are conſonant with it, they come un"der the denomination of Chriſtianity†:" where he ſeems fairly to own, that Chriſt was ſent in a *particular and ſpecial manner to acquaint the world* with a *revelation of God's will*. He alſo acknowledges, that "the writings of the apoſtles contain ex"cellent cautions, advices, and inſtructions, which ſerve for the "right conducting our affections and actions: That the Chriſ"tian revelation, one would hope, was kindly intended to guide "men's underſtandings into the knowledge of thoſe truths, in "which their higheſt intereſt is concerned, and to engage them "to be juſtly affected therewith, and act accordingly; and that "it naturally tends to reform the vices, and rightly to direct the "affections and behaviour of men." And finally, "that it may

* Chubb's poſthumous Works, vol. ii. 41, 42, 43. compared with p. 394, 395, 396.

† Ibid. p. 346.

"perhaps

" perhaps be a piece of juſtice due to Chriſtianity (could it be " certainly determined what it is, and could it be ſeparated " from every thing that hath been blended with it), to acknow- " ledge that it yields a much clearer light, and is a more ſafe " guide to mankind, than any other traditionary religion, as be- " ing better adapted to improve and perfect human nature*."

Theſe things would naturally lead us to think, that he had a friendly deſign towards Chriſtianity and the holy Scriptures. But, notwithſtanding all theſe ſpecious profeſſions, whoſoever reads what he calls his *Farewell to his Readers*, with ever ſo little attention, muſt be convinced, that the principal deſign of it was to ſubvert the credit and divine authority of the Chriſtian revelation.

Though he declares, that he looks upon it to be probable that Chriſt's miſſion was divine, yet he has taken great pains to ſhew, that the proofs which are brought for it are not at all to be depended upon. Having obſerved, that the two principal arguments or evidences uſually inſiſted on to prove the divine original of the Chriſtian revelation are prophecy and miracles, he uſes his utmoſt efforts to invalidate both theſe: two long ſections of his *Farewell to his Readers* are employed this way, *viz.* the ſeventh and eighth: and as to the reſurrection of Chriſt, he labours for near fifty pages together to repreſent it as an abſurd and incredible thing †.

In his ninth ſection, in which he propoſes to treat of the perſonal character of Jeſus Chriſt, he does all he can to expoſe the account given of his being born of a virgin, as a fiction ‡. And whereas Chriſt is repreſented as having been perfect, and without ſin, he will have it to be underſtood, not that he was abſolutely ſinleſs, but that no public or groſs miſcarriages could be charged upon him §. The higheſt character he ſeems willing to allow him is, that he was the " founder of the Chriſtian ſect ‖," or, as he elſewhere expreſſeth it, that he " collected a body of diſciples, " and laid a foundation for a new ſect among the Jews **": for he ſuppoſes, that, according to Jeſus's original intention, Chriſtianity

* Chubb's poſthumous Works, vol. ii. p. 297. 344. 347. 370.
† Ibid. vol. i. p. 333, &c.
‡ Ibid. vol. ii. p. 268—285.
§ Ibid. vol. ii. p. 269.
‖ Ibid. vol. i. p. 50.
** Ibid. vol. ii. p. 395.

was only deſigned to be a *ſupplement* to Judaiſm, and that the Moſaical conſtitution was to continue always in full force, and that his goſpel was to be preached only to the Jews in all nations, and not to the Gentiles at all, though the apoſtles afterwards deviated from his plan*. He owns indeed, that he advanced ſome proper precepts of his own, in which he ſeemed to correct the conſtitutions of Moſes; but he endeavours to ſhew, that in theſe he made alterations for the worſe, and that thoſe precepts by which he is thought to have been moſt diſtinguiſhed, inſtead of being more excellent than thoſe of other teachers and law-givers, are really leſs excellent, and leſs perfect; and, if taken in their proper and natural ſenſe, are contrary to the reaſon of things, and inconſiſtent with the welfare and happineſs of mankind. This is the principal deſign he appears to have had in view, in what he calls *Remarks on the Scriptures;* which is the firſt tract in his *Poſthumous Works.*

In ſome of the paſſages above cited, he ſeems to give a favourable account of Chriſtianity, and proceeds ſo far as to ſpecify what the true goſpel of Chriſt is, and what that meſſage is, which he allows Chriſt was ſent of God to deliver to the world; yet in plain contradiction to himſelf, he aſſerts in ſeveral parts of his book, that it is utterly uncertain what meſſage Chriſt was ſent to publiſh to the world, or wherein true Chriſtianity doth conſiſt. This is what he particularly endeavoureth to ſhew in his ſixth ſection†. And in that very paſſage before cited, where he pretends that it is a *piece of juſtice due to Chriſtianity*, to acknowledge, that it *yields a much clearer light*, and is a *more ſafe guide than* any other *traditionary religion*, he at the ſame time inſinuates, that it *cannot be defined or determined what Chriſtianity is*‡. He aſſerts, that "it has been ſo looſely and indeterminately delivered to the world, that nothing but contention and confuſion has attended it from its firſt promulgation to this time: and that the books of the New Teſtament have been ſo far from being a remedy to this evil, that they have contributed to it§." Accordingly, he expreſsly calls the New Teſtament, that *fountain of confuſion and contradiction*‖. And

* Chubb's poſthumous Works, vol. ii. p. 85, 86. 168. † Ibid. p. 72—122.
‡ Ibid. p. 370. § Ibid. p. 57. 315. ‖ Ibid. p. 246, 247.

whereas

whereas Mr. Chillingworth had ſaid, that *the Bible is the religion of Proteſtants*, Mr. Chubb thinks, that "unleſs it be ſo "interpreted as to be made conformable to the great rule of "right and wrong, which, he ſays, in ſome inſtances cannot "be done without force and violence, it muſt be an unſafe guide "to mankind*;" and that to appeal to Scripture "would be "a certain way to perplexity and diſſatisfaction, but not to find "out the truth†." And before this he had ſaid, that "the Bible "has been the grand ſource of hereſies and ſchiſms; and that it "exhibits doctrines ſeemingly the moſt oppoſite, ſome of which "are greatly diſhonourable to God, others the moſt injurious to "men‡." I think it is not eaſy to give a worſe idea of the ſcriptures than this author has done. If his account of them be a juſt one, it muſt be very dangerous to read them; and it would be a kindneſs to keep them out of the hands of the people: for he ſeems directly to charge all this upon the ſcriptures themſelves, and not upon the fault of thoſe that pervert and abuſe them. And yet this very conſiſtent writer declares againſt *locking up the Bible from the people*, and that "this is moſt unſafe, as it has "put the people ſo far under the power of the clergy, as to in-"volve them in the moſt groſs ignorance and ſuperſtition, and "the moſt abſolute ſlavery both in civil and religious matters§." Is not this plainly to acknowledge, that the being well acquainted with the holy ſcriptures is one of the beſt preſervatives againſt ignorance, prieſtcraft, and ſuperſtition, and a great advantage and ſecurity to truth and liberty? And what then muſt we think of the attempt made by him and other deiſtical writers to expoſe and vilify the holy Scriptures, and deſtroy all veneration for them in the minds of men, which, if believed, muſt induce an abſolute neglect, and even contempt, of thoſe ſacred writings? Ought not this, by his own acknowledgment, to be regarded as an attempt to bring us back into the *moſt groſs ignorance, ſuperſtition, and ſlavery?*

As a farther proof of the author's good-will towards Chriſtianity, it may be obſerved, that he repreſents it as favouring of enthuſiaſm; and he explains enthuſiaſm to be "a groundleſs per-

* Chubb's poſthumous Works, vol. ii. p. 326. † Ibid. p. 335.
‡ Ibid. vol. i. p. 6. 57. § Ibid. vol. ii. p. 327. 345.

" ſuaſion, that the Deity dictates and impreſſes upon the mind of " the promulger the ſubject matter of his miniſtry, and therefore " ſuch miniſtry is ſuppoſed to be not of or from men, but of and " from God*." And as he here ſuppoſes Chriſtianity to be the product of enthuſiaſm, ſo he elſewhere charges the apoſtles and firſt publiſhers of Chriſtianity with impoſture. He repreſents them as capable of giving a *falſe teſtimony* to ſerve the Chriſtian cauſe, and that they acted upon this principle, " that truth in ſome caſes may and ought to be diſpenſed with, and made to give way to falſehood and diſſimulation;" and upon this he aſks, " How then will the miracles wrought by Jeſus Chriſt and his " apoſtles be proved to be other than impoſtures? ſuppoſing " them to be much better atteſted than at preſent they appear " to be†."

Theſe and other things that might be mentioned may let us into the true ſpirit and deſign of this writer, and may help us to judge of the proteſtations he has made with great ſolemnity in the concluſion of his *Farewell to his Readers.* " If any ſay, that " what I have written is out of diſreſpect to the perſon and mi- " niſtry of Jeſus Chriſt, the accuſation is falſe." And he adds, " as upon the Chriſtian ſcheme, Jeſus Chriſt will be the judge of " quick and dead, ſo I aſſure my readers, that in this view, and " upon this conſideration, I have no diſagreeable apprehenſion " on account of any thing that I have publiſhed to the world ‡."

Having given this general idea of our author's work, I ſhall in my next letter offer ſome remarks upon thoſe parts of his book which may ſeem to require a more particular conſideration.

* Chubb's poſthumous Works, vol. ii. p. 49. 53.
† Ibid. p. 92, 93. 130, 131. 230, 231. ‡ Ibid. p. 533.

LETTER XIV.

Some farther Remarks on Mr. Chubb's Poſthumous Works—*The unfair Repreſentation he makes of our Saviour's Precepts in his Sermon on the Mount—His groſs Perverſions of Scripture—His Charge againſt it, as uncertain, and as having been greatly depraved and corrupted by the Church of Rome, conſidered—Obſervations upon the Attempt he makes to invalidate the Proof from Prophecy and Miracles—The Parallel he draws between the Propagation of Chriſtianity and the Progreſs of Methodiſm examined—The Falſehood of his Pretence, that the Apoſtles quite changed the original Plan of Chriſtianity, and that they laid a Scheme for worldly Wealth and Power—His Invectives againſt St. Paul malicious and unjuſt—He repreſents all Religions to be alike with regard to the Favour of God, and pretends to direct Men to an infallible Guide.*

SIR,

IN my laſt, I gave a general account of Mr. Chubb's poſthumous treatiſes. I ſhall now add ſome farther obſervations relating to ſome parts of thoſe tracts which may ſeem to deſerve to be more particularly conſidered.

Of this kind is the attempt he hath made to expoſe our Saviour's precepts in his admirable ſermon on the mount, which is deſigned to teach the moſt pure and excellent morality. In ſeveral of theſe precepts, our Lord evidently maketh uſe of a proverbial way of ſpeaking, ſhort and comprehenſive aphoriſms, delivered in phraſes, ſome of which may perhaps appear not ſo uſual among us, but which were familiar to thoſe to whom they were at firſt delivered. Every one knows, that, in ſuch caſes, every expreſſion is not to be taken in the utmoſt ſtrictneſs, but the general intention is to be regarded, which is plain enough to an honeſt and attentive mind. But this writer ſeems reſolved to take them in the moſt abſurd ſenſe he can poſſibly put upon them. Thus, he interprets the precept againſt reſiſting evil, which is manifeſtly intended to check and ſuppreſs private revenge, and to teach us that wiſe leſſon, "that it is better in many

many caſes, patiently to bear injuries, eſpecially in ſmaller inſtances, than to give way to a keen and forward reſentment and retaliation of them," as if it were deſigned abſolutely, and in all caſes, to forbid us to ſhun or guard againſt the evils and injuries offered to us, and required us rather to expoſe ourſelves to thoſe evils. But this certainly could not be the intention of that excellent teacher, who exhorteth his diſciples to be *wiſe as ſerpents* in avoiding evil, as well as *innocent as doves;* and directeth them, inſtead of needleſsly expoſing themſelves, when *perſecuted in one city, to flee unto another.* The precept about loving our enemies is deſigned to reſtrain and heal that bitter and malevolent ſpirit which men are ſo apt to indulge, and to carry benevolence to the nobleſt height. It teacheth us, that no private enmities or diſguſts ſhould cauſe us to forget the common ties of humanity: that with regard to our enemies themſelves, we ſhould be earneſtly deſirous of their amendment and true happineſs, and ſhould be ready, when a proper opportunity offers, to do them good offices, and to overcome their enmity with kindneſs, which is the nobleſt victory. But our candid author would have it to be underſtood to ſignify, that we ſhould put no difference in our affection and eſteem between good and bad men, but ſhould have an equal complacency in perſons of the vileſt characters as in thoſe of the beſt*. And becauſe our Saviour ſpeaks of God's doing good, in the methods of his common providence, even to the unthankful and the evil, he pretends, that, according to his repreſentation, the perfection of the Supreme Being conſiſteth in his being affected towards all intelligent beings alike, and ſhewing equal love and favour to the righteous and to the wicked; than which nothing can be more contrary to Chriſt's manifeſt intention, and to the whole tenor of his teaching and miniſtry. Our Lord's excellent diſcourſe againſt anxious cares, and a diſtracting or diſtruſtful thoughtfulneſs for to-morrow, he interprets as deſigned to recommend *thoughtleſſneſs and indolence,* and abſolutely to forbid that *thoughtfulneſs and induſtry, which man's preſent indigent condition, and the preſent conſtitution of things, make neceſſary* †. And the precept by which we are directed *not to lay up* for ourſelves *treaſures on earth,* but to lay

* Chubb's poſthumous Works, vol. i. p. 18, 19. † Ibid. p. 22, 23.

up

up for ourſelves *treaſures in heaven*, which is plainly intended to check a too eager purſuit of worldly riches, and a placing our chief happineſs in theſe things, he repreſents as if it were deſigned abſolutely to condemn all worldly acquiſitions, however lawfully obtained, and well uſed and employed. In like manner, he interprets what our Saviour ſays in a parabolical way, Luke xvi. 12, 13. concerning inviting the poor, the blind, and the lame; and which, as may be gathered from the context by comparing ver. 7, &c. was deſigned to rebuke the vanity of expenſive and oſtentatious entertainments, whilſt the poor and indigent were neglected; as if it were his intention, that all Chriſtians ſhould deny themſelves the pleaſure of ever entertaining, or being entertained by friends, relations, and thoſe of their own rank, and were to confine themſelves wholly to the company, converſation, and friendſhip of the *poor*, the *maimed*, the *lame*, and the *blind**: though it is very evident from his own practice, that our Lord Jeſus was far from diſcouraging an agreeable intercourſe and converſation among friends, and the offices and entertainments of the ſocial life; and I dare ſay, not one either of the Jews, or of his own diſciples, ever underſtood him in this ſenſe.

But Mr. Chubb takes upon him to pronounce, that theſe and the like precepts are all to be underſtood in the moſt ſtrict literal ſenſe, and do not admit of *any limitation*, or any palliating interpretation to be put upon them; and he repreſents them as the proper precepts of Chriſtianity, *peculiar*, as he expreſſeth it, to the *Chriſtian ſect*, and *in which their founder's honour is peculiarly concerned;* and pretends, that the obſervance of theſe alone, in the abſurd ſenſe he puts upon them, is what conſtitutes a true Chriſtian. And as theſe are the precepts that are acknowledged to be peculiarly Chriſtian, he thinks that from thence a judgment may be formed, whether there be any juſt ground for boaſting, that Chriſtian morals are much more excellent and perfect, than any other ſyſtem of morals that hath been exhibited to men*.

Nothing can poſſibly be more unfair and diſingenuous, than this conduct of our author. No man of candour, who conſiders the deep wiſdom and good ſenſe which appeareth in our Saviour's diſcourſes, can reaſonably ſuppoſe, that it was his intention to

* Chubb's poſthumous Works, vol. i. p. 25, 26.

† Ibid. p. 27, 28. 31. 39, 40.

recommend

recommend ſuch abſurd inſtructions and advices as they muſt have been, according to this writer's repreſentation of them. Our Lord's deſign, in his excellent ſermon on the mount, was not, as he himſelf declares, to deſtroy the law and the prophets; it was to vindicate them from the narrow and corrupt gloſſes of the Jewiſh doctors. And what could be more worthy of a teacher ſent from God, the great Saviour and lover of mankind, than to forbid the being angry without a cauſe, all injurious and reproachful expreſſions, all adultery and impurity, even in heart and thought; and to recommend purity, charity, meekneſs, benevolence, the forgiveneſs of injuries, and even a rendering good for evil, and overcoming evil with good? to warn men againſt an exceſſive love of worldly riches, which hath in all ages been the ſource of numberleſs evils and diſorders among mankind, and engage them to raiſe their affections and views to things of a far higher and nobler nature, things celeſtial and eternal? to direct men to a calm contentment and dependence on divine providence, in every condition, as the beſt preſervative againſt thoſe anxious diſtracting cares and ſolicitudes, which, when they prevail, deſtroy the reliſh of life? What our Saviour hath delivered on theſe, and on other heads of great importance to the happineſs of mankind, is comprehended in ſhort maxims, ſtrongly and cloſely expreſſed, which makes them more apt to ſtrike, and more eaſily remembered; but without deſcending to particular exceptions and limitations, which, for the moſt part, common ſenſe, and the nature of the thing, eaſily direct to. He, who was perfectly acquainted with human nature, very well knew, that there was no great danger of men's taking them in too ſtrict a ſenſe, and that they would be forward enough to find out limitations for themſelves. And any one that impartially conſiders the variety of matters treated of, in that excellent ſermon on the mount, ſuch a vaſt extent of pure and noble morals comprized in ſo ſmall a compaſs, and delivered with the moſt comprehenſive brevity, will be apt to admire the wiſdom of this heavenly teacher, and to have a juſt diſlike of a writer that could turn thoſe admirable leſſons to the diſadvantage of the holy Jeſus and the Chriſtian religion. And I am perſuaded, that any man who ſhould treat the maxims and wiſe ſayings of the philoſophers or great men of antiquity, as this author has done thoſe of our Saviour, would be

regarded

regarded by all rational and thinking men among the deiſts themſelves, as a rude and impertinent caviller. What renders Mr. Chubb more inexcuſable is, that he himſelf ſeems to have been very ſenſible, that thoſe precepts were not intended in the ſenſe he has thought fit to put upon them: for though, in what he calls *Remarks on the Scriptures*, he contends, as hath been ſhewn, that no other interpretation ought to be admitted, yet in another part of his *Poſthumous Works*, viz. in the ninth ſection of his *Farewell*, where he profeſſes to treat concerning the perſonal character of Jeſus Chriſt, he produces theſe very precepts as inſtances of Chriſt's figurative way of ſpeaking, and plainly owns, that they ought not to be taken, nor were originally intended, in the ſtrict literal ſenſe he had put upon them. To this purpoſe he particularly mentions the precepts of not reſiſting evil, of loving our enemies, and giving to every one that aſketh*; and from thence concludes, that we muſt uſe our reaſon in judging of the ſenſe of ſcripture, and of our Saviour's precepts; which will be readily allowed. The ſcripture undoubtedly ſuppoſeth us to be reaſonable creatures, and our Saviour addreſſeth himſelf to us as ſuch: but it by no means follows, as he inſinuates, that becauſe we are to uſe our underſtandings in judging of the ſenſe of ſcripture, and all laws, that therefore our own reaſon could guide us as well without them, and that theſe precepts are of no uſe, and that it is of no advantage to have them enforced by a divine authority.

It may not be improper on this occaſion to take notice of ſome other of his groſs perverſions of ſcripture. A ſignal inſtance of this kind we have in the ſame tract, in which he makes ſo ſtrange a repreſentation of ſeveral of our Saviour's precepts. Speaking of that noted paſſage, 1 John ii. 1, 2. *My little children, theſe things write I unto you, that ye ſin not; and if any man ſin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jeſus Chriſt the righteous; and he is the propitiation for our ſins, and not for ours only, but alſo for the ſins of the whole world.* He obſerves, that "this "paſſage may be ſuppoſed to beſpeak comfort and ſafety to a "wicked Chriſtian, *i. e.* to a wicked man who is a believer in "Jeſus Chriſt, and profeſſes diſcipleſhip to him; and that it

* Chubb's poſthumous Works, vol. ii. p. 289. 293, 294, &c.

"is

" is but for a man to apply theſe words of John to himſelf, and " the practice of vice is made eaſy to him*." That this could not poſſibly be St. John's meaning in this paſſage, is evident from the whole tenour of his epiſtle, and particularly from the words immediately following, in which he declares, *hereby we do know* that we know him, *i. e.* Jeſus Chriſt, *if we keep his commandments. He that ſaith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him*, ver. 3. 4. Our author himſelf is ſenſible, that the interpretation he hath given of this paſſage is not conſiſtent with what St. John hath ſaid in other parts of his epiſtle. But that gives him no concern; it will only ſhew that St. John contradicts himſelf; which is what he would have him thought to do: and therefore with an unparalleled aſſurance he inſiſteth upon it, that the account he hath given of St. John's meaning, is the true one, " whatever " St. John, or any other writer of the New Teſtament, in op- " poſition to this, may have elſewhere ſaid to the contrary." His manner of expreſſing himſelf plainly ſhews, that he is reſolved this ſhall be St. John's ſenſe, contrary to his own moſt expreſs declarations, and to the entire ſtrain of the New Teſtament; becauſe he thinks it tends to expoſe Chriſtianity, though in reality by ſuch a procedure he has only expoſed himſelf. But he urgeth, that " if Chriſt be the propitiation for all ſins, then " the moſt wicked Chriſtian muſt needs be in a ſafe and com- " fortable ſtate; and even wicked pagans and infidels, as well as " Chriſtians, penitent and impenitent, becauſe God would not " be ſo unreaſonable and unjuſt, as to take double ſatisfaction " for the ſame offences." And in ſome other parts of his book, he inveighs againſt the doctrine of Chriſt's being the propitiation for ſins, as contrary to truth, and the eternal reaſon of things†. But in all that he has ſaid on this head, he either diſcovers a groſs ignorance of the ſcripture-doctrine of Chriſt's being the propitiation for our ſins, or makes a wilful miſrepreſentation of it; ſince nothing can be more evident than it is from the whole New Teſtament, that Chriſt's dying for our ſins was not deſigned to free men from an obligation to holineſs and obedience, but rather to lay them under ſtronger engagements to it; and that accord-

* Chubb's poſthumous Works, vol. i. p. 37, 38.

† Ibid. p. 250. and vol. ii. p. 112, 113. 304.

ing

ing to the gospel covenant, none can expect an interest in the benefits arising from Christ's sufferings and sacrifice, or from his mediation and intercession, but those that turn from their sins by a sincere repentance, and who submit to be governed by his holy and most excellent laws. The doctrine of Christ's satisfaction, rightly understood, is so far from giving the least encouragement to sin, that it tendeth to impress men's hearts with the deepest sense of the heinous evil and malignity of sin, and of God's just displeasure against it. Not only do those who teach that doctrine as delivered in the scriptures, insist as strongly as any others upon the necessity of repentance and personal holiness, in order to their acceptance with God, but they maintain, that at the same time that God promiseth pardon to the truly penitent, he taketh care to dispense that pardon in such a way, as to make an awful declaration of his hatred against sin, and to vindicate the authority of his government and laws. What can have a greater tendency to prevent our abusing his pardoning mercy, and to excite in us a holy fear of offending him, than to consider that he would not receive even penitent sinners to his grace and favour, without a sacrifice of infinite virtue offered up on their behalf, consisting in the perfect obedience and sufferings of the great Mediator? And that it was upon the merit of his obedience and sufferings, that that covenant was founded and established, in which God hath graciously engaged to accept of our repentance, and to reward our sincere though imperfect obedience with eternal life?

Many other instances might be mentioned of Mr. Chubb's strange glosses upon scripture. He seems particularly to take pleasure in misrepresenting and exposing the writings of St. Paul. Thus, because that great apostle, in arguing against the false Jewish teachers, who insisted upon the observance of the Mosaic law and ceremonies, as absolutely necessary to salvation under the gospel, urgeth, that, if they were *justified by the law*, they were *fallen from grace*, *i. e.* from the grace of the gospel, and the way of justification there proposed, Gal. v. 4. he charges him with maintaining in the height of his zeal, that *obedience to the law of Moses was incompatible with salvation;* and that let men otherwise be ever so good and excellent persons, this error concerning the obligation of the Mosaic law would exclude them from

from the favour of God, and from eternal ſalvation. *And in this*, ſaith he, *the Apoſtle muſt ſurely have greatly erred**. But it ought to be conſidered, that thoſe Jewiſh teachers, whom St. Paul there oppoſes, are repreſented as men of corrupt minds, who acted from worldly and ſiniſter ends and views, and who were not ſtrict in keeping the law themſelves, though they were for binding it upon others, Gal. vi. 12, 13. And the apoſtle there expreſsly declareth, that in Chriſt Jeſus, or under the goſpel diſpenſation, *neither circumciſion availeth any thing, nor uncircumciſion*, *i. e.* neither the obſervance nor non-obſervance of theſe outward rites, *but faith which worketh by love*, or, as he elſewhere expreſſeth it, the *new creature*, *i. e.* a real ſanctifying change of heart and life. See Gal. v. 6. vi. 15. 1 Cor. vii. 19. Again, he pretends, that St. Paul repreſents the calling of the Gentiles as not originally deſigned by God, or as an effect of his goodneſs towards the Gentiles, but as ſpringing only from his having *taken up a pique or reſentment againſt the Jews*, which, he ſays, "is a ſpring of action much too low, and altogether un-"worthy of the ſupreme Deity†." But nothing is more evident than that this apoſtle frequently aſcribes the calling of the Gentiles to the free grace and gratuitous favour of God, and ſpeaks of it in noble terms, as having been deſigned in the councils of the divine wiſdom and love before the foundation of the world, Eph. i. 3, 4, 5, 6. iii. 8, 9. Farther to expoſe that excellent apoſtle, he repreſents it, as if in ſaying, that *if in this life only we have hope in Chriſt, we are of all men the moſt miſerable*, 1 Cor. xv. 19. he intended to ſignify, that the practice of piety and virtue is not in its own nature ſo eligible, or ſo conducive to the real ſatisfaction of this preſent life, as that of vice and ſin. Nor will he allow that St. Paul in this part of the argument has any reference to the caſe of perſecution; and yet certain it is, that he moſt expreſsly refers to it, ver. 29, 30, 31, 32.; and his evident deſign is to ſignify the unhappy condition Chriſtians would be reduced to, under the grievous perſecutions to which they were then expoſed, if it were not for their future hopes. But he eſpecially finds great fault with St. Paul for his doctrine concerning ſubjection to the higher powers, Rom. xiii. 1. 6. as

* Chubb's poſthumous Works, vol. ii. p. 96, 97. † Ibid. p. 88.

if

if it were calculated for promoting tyranny and ſlavery. This he inſiſts upon for ſeveral pages together, in two different parts of his *Poſthumous Works;* and yet the apoſtle's doctrine, rightly conſidered, is admirable. He ſhews, that obedience to the civil powers is a duty which Chriſtianity enjoins; that it was not deſigned to exempt men from ſubjection to their lawful governors, though heathens, or to relax the bands of civil duty and allegiance. He doth not meddle with the queſtions concerning the rights of Senates; or particular forms of polity, but ſpeaks of the duty of private perſons, and therefore preſſes their obedience and ſubjection, without reſtrictions and limitations; and to have mentioned ſuch reſtrictions would certainly have been of bad conſequence; eſpecially conſidering the ſeditious diſpoſitions of the Jews, and how they were then affected. But our author is not willing to allow, that religion has any thing to do with obedience to our civil governors; and, in expreſs oppoſition to St. Paul, declares, that government cannot be ſaid to be the ordinance, or by the appointment, of God. He maintains, that the proper argument for obliging men to ſubjection and obedience is, not government's being the ordinance of God, but its being neceſſary to the well-being of mankind. And does not the apoſtle manifeſtly urge this? He both raiſeth our views to the original of government in the authority and appointment of God himſelf, and pointeth out to us the proper ends of government, and its great uſefulneſs to mankind, and excellently argueth from both theſe. So that he is far from what this writer here thinks fit to charge him with, a *fallacious and injurious way of reaſoning.*

He takes particular notice of the allegory * St. Paul makes uſe of, Gal. iv. 21, &c. and uſes his utmoſt endeavours to place it in a moſt ridiculous light. Nothing can be more unfair and diſingenuous than the account he is pleaſed to give of it, in which he entirely miſrepreſents the deſign and ſtrain of the apoſtle's diſcourſe. But a particular examination of what he offers, with regard to this and ſeveral other paſſages of Scripture, would carry me too far. It is ſufficient to obſerve, that a careful and un-

* Mr. Collins had endeavoured to expoſe that allegory; and the deſign and conſiſtency of it was fully cleared in the anſwers that were made to that writer. Nor has Mr. Chubb offered any thing upon it that can be called new.

prejudiced conſideration of the context, and a comparing one part of Scripture with another, might eaſily have ſet him right as to the ſenſe of moſt of the paſſages he mentions; or he might have found his difficulties cleared by able and judicious commentators, if he had been as willing to have his objections ſatisfied, as he was to raiſe them, or as a ſincere inquirer after truth ought to be. Candid critics, if they meet with a paſſage in Homer, Plato, Ariſtotle, Tully, or any other celebrated profane author of antiquity, which at firſt view has ſomething in it that they cannot well explain or account for, are very unwilling to charge the original author with nonſenſe and abſurdity, and think themſelves obliged to uſe their utmoſt endeavours to find out a convenient or favourable ſenſe of the paſſage in queſtion. But with this writer, and many others of the ſame claſs, it ſeems to be a rule to interpret every paſſage of Scripture in the moſt abſurd ſenſe that can poſſibly be put upon it.

Several paſſages were produced in my former letter, to which many others might be added, in which Mr. Chubb exclaims againſt the ſcripture as the ſource of endleſs contentions and diviſions, as if it were to be charged with all the abſurd and contradictory opinions, that have at any time been grafted upon it. This he repreſents, as owing to its being "expreſſed in a looſe "indeterminate way, which would be a defect in a human com-"poſition, but is ſcarce ſuppoſable in the caſe of divine revela-"tion*." But it is no argument, that a thing is looſely and indeterminately expreſſed, becauſe men differ or contend about the ſenſe of it. This is owing to other cauſes. Suppoſing a divine revelation given to mankind, ever ſo clear and determinate, it could ſcarce be avoided, without a conſtant miraculous interpoſition, irreſiſtibly impreſſing and overruling the minds of all men, but that there would be a difference of ſentiments and opinions among mankind, about many things in it: and yet this would not hinder but that ſuch a revelation would be of ſignal uſe for inſtructing men in things of great importance. The fallacy of ſuch a way of arguing, as if men's differing about any thing were a proof of its uncertainty, has been often expoſed, as what would baniſh all religion, truth, reaſon, and evidence, out

* Chubb's poſthumous Works, vol. ii. p. 246, 247.

of

of the world: yet this is a common-place with the deiſtical writers, to which they have recourſe on all occaſions. Many made uſe of it before our author: and ſince the publiſhing of his works, a late right honourable writer hath been pleaſed to renew the charge. I ſhall not here repeat what I have elſewhere offered in anſwer to his Lordſhip, and which will equally ſerve to obviate all that Mr. Chubb hath advanced on this head*.

The ſame obſervation may be made with regard to his attempts againſt the ſacred canon. He pretends, as others had done before him, that there is no proof that the books of the New Teſtament were written in the firſt age of the Chriſtian church; that there were many ſpurious goſpels in the primitive times, and that the Chriſtians had no way of diſtinguiſhing the genuine from the falſe. Theſe, and other things to the ſame purpoſe, he very frequently repeats in ſeveral parts of his *Farewell to his Readers*, as if he thought the frequent repetition of them would perſuade his readers of their truth. But I ſhall not need to take any particular notice of them here, but refer to what was ſaid on this ſubject in the fourth letter, where ſome account is given of the anſwers that were made to Toland's *Amyntor:* to which may be added, what hath been lately offered in anſwer to the ſame objections, when urged by the noble writer laſt-mentioned†.

Mr. Chubb hath alſo raiſed a great clamour about the corruption of Scripture. He layeth it down as a principle, that if God gave a revelation for the uſe of mankind, he would take care that it ſhould be tranſmitted ſafe and uncorrupted to all ſucceeding generations, and would, by a particular and conſtant application of his power and providence, have defended it from all injury, wherever it was promulged, and whatever language it was rendered into. He intimates, that God ought to have puniſhed with a ſudden death, as in the caſe of Ananias and Sapphira, every man that had committed any error, either in tranſcribing or tranſlating it. And if this had been the caſe, the conſequence would have been, that no man would have ventured to tranſcribe or tranſlate it at all: and this, no doubt, is what theſe gentlemen would wiſh. But there is no neceſſity for having recourſe to ſuch

* See Reflections on Lord Bolingbroke's Letters, p. 125, &c.

† Ibid. p. 98, &c.

extraordinary methods; we have ſufficient evidence to ſatisfy any reaſonable perſon, that this revelation is tranſmitted to us, without any ſuch corruptions or alterations as can deſtroy the uſefulneſs of that revelation, or defeat the important ends for which it was originally given. This hath been often clearly ſhewn. Our author indeed pronounces with great confidence, that "it is a thing abundantly evident, that the Chriſtian revela-"tion hath been greatly depraved and corrupted; that its pre-"tended guardians have extracted the myſtery of iniquity from "it: and that we have received the books referred to from that "grand fountain of corruption the church of Rome, who muſt "have been naturally, and almoſt unavoidably led to corrupt them "in thoſe times of ignorance, to juſtify herſelf in all other cor-"ruptions and abuſes." This he frequently repeats, as his manner is, in ſeveral parts of his book, and it hath been often urged by the deiſtical writers*; and it muſt be acknowledged, that if a general corruption of the Scriptures could have been poſſibly effected, none had ſo good an opportunity, or a ſtronger temptation to attempt it, than the church of Rome: and yet it is evident in fact, that they have not corrupted the Scriptures in thoſe inſtances in which it was moſt their intereſt, and we might imagine alſo moſt in their inclination, to have corrupted them. There might be ſome pretence for ſuch a charge, if there had been any expreſs and formal paſſages inſerted in the New Teſtament, in favour of the papal ſupremacy, of St. Peter's having been biſhop of Rome, the worſhip of images, the invocation of ſaints and angels, purgatory, the communion in one kind, againſt prieſts' marriage, and in favour of the monaſtic vows, &c.; but our author hath not attempted to produce any paſſages of this kind; and he himſelf has obſerved, that "the New Teſtament was not ſuf-"ficient to ſupport the weight of the conſtitution of the church "of Rome, and therefore its builders prudently annexed tradi-"tion to it†." He alſo finds fault with their locking up the Bible from the laity, as what hath put them ſo far under the power of the clergy, as to involve them in groſs ignorance, ſuperſtition, and ſlavery. Thus, this very conſiſtent writer, with

* Chubb's poſthumous Works, vol. ii. p. 65, 66. 118. 121, 122.

† Ibid. vol. ii. p. 58.

a view

a view to expoſe the New Teſtament, would perſuade us, that popery is taught and founded there, and yet would have the Bible kept in the hands of the people as a proper preſervative againſt it.

The arguments in favour of the Jewiſh and Chriſtian revelation from prophecy and miracles have always been looked upon as of great weight; and Mr. Chubb hath taken great pains to invalidate both theſe. With regard to prophecy, which is the entire ſubject of the ſeventh ſection of his *Farewell to his Readers**, he pretends not to deny, that there may be true prophecy; that God may certainly foreknow future events, and may enable perſons to foretel them: but he denies, that the prediction of future events can be admitted as an evidence of divine revelation, becauſe a prophecy can never be known to be a true prophecy till it be fulfilled; and therefore can never be a proof or evidence at the time of its delivery, becauſe it muſt appear as yet uncertain. His argument here proceeds upon a wrong ſuppoſition, as if the advocates for revelation maintained, that the mere prediction of a future event, even before the completion of it, were alone a ſufficient proof to thoſe who heard the prediction, of the divine miſſion of the perſons who delivered it. This was far from being the only proof that was given either of the Moſaic or Chriſtian revelation. They were both of them at their firſt promulgation atteſted and eſtabliſhed by an amazing ſucceſſion of the moſt wonderful works, and which plainly argued an extraordinary divine interpoſition: beſides which, both Moſes and the prophets under the Old Teſtament, and our Lord Jeſus Chriſt and his apoſtles under the New, were enabled to give many expreſs predictions of future events; ſome of which related to things which were to happen in their own time, and received a ſpeedy accompliſhment; others related to events that were not to happen till ſome ages after the prediction, and theſe alſo received their accompliſhment in the proper ſeaſon. And this, added to the other evidences, exhibited a farther illuſtrious proof of a divine interpoſition in favour of the Jewiſh and Chriſtian revelation, and ſhews, that the firſt publiſhers of it were extraordinarily inſpired by God, who, by the author's own acknow-

* Chubb's poſthumous Works, vol. ii. p. 139—174.

ledgment, can alone foreſee and foretel future contingent events. It was wiſely ordered, that miracles and prophecy ſhould go together; whereby not only the moſt ſtriking evidence was given to the truth and divinity of the revelation, at the time when it was firſt promulgated, but proviſion was made that there ſhould be a growing evidence, which might acquire new force and ſtrength by the ſucceſſive accompliſhment of the prophecies in the ſeveral different periods to which they refer. Indeed, if it were only a ſingle prediction or two, the fulfilling of them might be looked upon to be accidental, and to amount to no more than a lucky conjecture: but a ſeries of prophecies, ſuch as is ſet before us in the ſacred writings, many of them relating to things of a moſt contingent nature, removed at the diſtance of ſeveral ages, and which depended upon things that no human ſagacity could foreſee, muſt be aſcribed to an extraordinary divine aſſiſtance; and it cannot reaſonably be ſuppoſed, that God would impart his preſcience to give credit to impoſtors, who falſely pretended to be inſpired by him to deliver doctrines and laws to mankind.

As to that part of the evidence of Chriſt's divine miſſion, which reſulteth from the prophecies of the Old Teſtament, this had been fully conſidered in the controverſy between Mr. Collins and his adverſaries, of which ſome account was given in the ſixth letter. What Mr. Chubb has offered on this head is very inconſiderable: but he has one reflection that may deſerve ſome notice: it is this: That, "ſuppoſing thoſe prophecies to have "been fulfilled in Jeſus Chriſt, they are not ſo much to be re-"garded as an evidence of the divine authority of the Chriſtian "revelation, as of the divine character of its primary promulger, "who, being a free being, muſt have been at liberty whether he "would have faithfully delivered thoſe truths to the world, that "had been delivered to him by his principal. And this," ſaith he, "muſt of neceſſity be the caſe of all divine revelation*." But, ſuppoſing there was a ſeries of prophecy, relating to a wonderful perſon, who was to appear, at a time prefixed, as a divine teacher and Lord, and who was to erect a diſpenſation of truth and righteouſneſs, and that his coming, perſon, offices, miracles,

* Chubb's poſthumous Works, p. 152, 153.

ſufferings,

ſufferings, and the glories that ſhould follow, were deſcribed and pointed out by many remarkable predictions, delivered at ſundry times and in divers manners, all which were fulfilled in Jeſus Chriſt, and in him only; this certainly muſt be looked upon as an illuſtrious atteſtation, not only to the divinity of his miſſion, but to the truth of the revelation he brought in the name of God: for it were moſt abſurd to ſuppoſe, that God would have inſpired ſo many perſons, in different ages, to foretel his coming and character as a divine teacher of truth and righteouſneſs, if he had not perfectly foreknown that he would certainly fulfil that character, and fulfil the great truſt repoſed in him. And the preparing mankind for his coming by ſuch a ſucceſſion of prophecies, and pointing him out by the moſt glorious and peculiar characters, ſo many ages before his actual appearing, tended to give him an atteſtation of a peculiar kind, and which was never equalled in any other caſe.

With regard to the prophecies of Daniel, this author thinks it is impoſſible, "that God ſhould deliver a prophecy ſo darkly, "as that one man only, and he a prodigy, amidſt the millions "of men that have taken place ſince that prophecy was deliver-"ed, ſhould be able to diſcover the true ſenſe and meaning of "it*;" where he goes upon a ſuppoſition which is manifeſtly falſe, *viz.* that no man before Sir Iſaac Newton was ever able to diſcover the meaning and intent of Daniel's prophecies. Many there have been who have laboured happily this way, both formerly and of late: and though there are ſeveral things in thoſe prophecies that are attended with great difficulty, there are others of the predictions contained in that book, which are ſo clear, that the application of them is comparatively eaſy. And they have been wonderfully verified, in a manner which ſhews they could only have proceeded from that all-ſeeing mind which preſides over contingencies, and clearly ſees through the ſucceſſion of ages. And the predictions there given relating to the Meſſiah, the deſign and end of his coming, and the deſolation of the Jewiſh city and temple that ſhould be connected with it, are of ſuch a nature, as to give a moſt remarkable atteſtation to our Lord Jeſus Chriſt, as the true promiſed Meſſiah. And it may

* Chubb's poſthumous Works, p. 147, 148.

be obſerved by the way, that this ſhews the vanity and falſehood of another of our author's ſuppoſitions, who pretends, that the Jewiſh expectation of the Meſſiah was ſolely owing to the notion they had of their being God's peculiar people, from whence it was natural for them to believe, that God would raiſe them up a glorious deliverer, who ſhould exalt their nation to the higheſt degree of proſperity and grandeur; and that the prophets humoured them in this their notion and expectation: For if this had been the caſe, the prophets would not have ſpoken of a ſuffering Meſſiah; nor would they have foretold, as they have done, his being rejected by the Jews, and the judgments which ſhould be then executed upon that nation, and that the Gentiles ſhould be partakers of the benefits of his kingdom.

This writer, who ſeems to value himſelf upon thinking out of the common way, can ſee nothing extraordinary in the predictions relating to the calamities and diſperſions of the Jews, and their wonderful preſervation, under all their diſperſions and calamities, for a long ſucceſſion of ages: and yet certain it is, that their being ſo generally diſperſed among all nations over the whole earth, and being ſtill preſerved as a diſtinct people, notwithſtanding the unexampled diſcouragements, reproaches, and ſufferings, to which they have been expoſed, is one of the moſt wonderful things, taken in all its circumſtances, that is to be found in the whole hiſtory of mankind: and as it hath no parallel, its being ſo plainly foretold above three thouſand years ago (for ſo long it is ſince the time of Moſes, who firſt prophecied of it) is a moſt ſignal inſtance of a true prophetic ſpirit, and could only be owing to the inſpiration of that omniſcient Being, who *declareth the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things which are not yet done.*

I ſhall only take notice of one obſervation more, which our author hath made with regard to the proof from prophecy, *viz.* that it appears from St. Paul's account, that the gift of prophecy was a diſtinct gift from that of knowledge, 1 Cor. xii. 8, 9, 10. and "that they had no connection or dependence upon one another:" and he thinks therefore, "that a perſon's foretelling "things to come, does not prove a ſuperiority of knowledge, "and that the prophet's knowledge extends farther than the pro-"phecies he delivers." But if we examine that paſſage of St.

Paul

Paul which he refers to, we ſhall find it is far from anſwering the end he propoſes by it, *viz.* to invalidate the proof from prophecy in favour of the Chriſtian revelation. The apoſtle is there ſpeaking of the ſeveral gifts of the Holy Ghoſt, which were poured forth on many of the Chriſtian converts in that firſt age, in various proportions and degrees according to his will. One of theſe was, that of prophecy. It is not certain, that by *prophecy*, in that particular paſſage, is to be underſtood the foretelling things to come; for the word prophecy is ſometimes taken in that epiſtle in another ſenſe: but allowing it to be ſo, ſince it appears from other paſſages that ſuch a gift there was in the firſt age of the Chriſtian church (and it was what our Saviour had promiſed, John xvi. 13.), in that caſe it muſt be ſaid, that ſuch a gift, if really conferred, could only proceed from God, or his Holy Spirit: and as thoſe extraordinary gifts, of which this was one, were communicated by the laying on of the hands of the apoſtles in the name of a crucified and riſen Jeſus, the conferring theſe gifts on any of the Chriſtian converts may be juſtly regarded as a moſt illuſtrious proof of a divine interpoſition in favour of Chriſtianity, and of the divine miſſion of the apoſtles, the firſt authorized publiſhers of it.

Having conſidered the principal things this writer has urged on the head of prophecy, I ſhall take ſome notice of what he hath offered concerning the proof from miracles: This is the ſubject of his eighth ſection*. He will not allow, that miracles can be any proof of the divine miſſion of perſons or truth of doctrines. What he chiefly inſiſteth upon to this purpoſe is, that the power of working miracles may be equally annexed to falſehood and truth: and whereas it might be objected, that God will not ſuffer miraculous power to be miſapplied, becauſe, were that the caſe, mankind would be greatly expoſed to impoſition, he anſwers, "that when a miracle is once wrought, it muſt and will "be in the option of the operator to apply that power as he "pleaſes, either well or ill, nor could God prevent it, otherwiſe "than by deſtroying his being or his agency." But ſuppoſing, which is the preſent ſuppoſition, a real power of working miracles communicated from God, with a view to give atteſtation to

* Chubb's poſthumous Works, vol. ii. p. 177—249.

the

the divine miſſion of perſons ſent to inſtruct the world in important truths, it is abſurd to ſuppoſe, that he would continue that power to them, if they applied it to the confirming of falſehood; or that he would have given them that power for atteſting truth, if he foreſaw they would uſe it in favour of falſehood; and in that caſe he muſt have foreſeen it. With regard to the power of working miracles in the firſt age of the Chriſtian church, it was not at the option of the perſons who had that power to uſe it when or to what purpoſe they pleaſed. They could only work thoſe miracles, when and upon what occaſion it ſeemed fit to the Holy Ghoſt that they ſhould do them; in which caſe they had an extraordinary impulſe, which is uſually called *the faith of miracles*, which was a kind of direction to them, when to work thoſe miracles, and whereby they knew and were perſuaded that God would enable them to do them. The proper uſe and deſign of thoſe miracles was, to confirm the teſtimony given by the apoſtles to our Saviour and his reſurrection, and the truth of the doctrines they taught as received from him: nor can any one proof be brought, though he takes it for granted, that any falſe teachers in that age did, by virtue of any extraordinary gift or powers of the Holy Ghoſt communicated to them, work miracles to confirm the falſe doctrines they preached. On the contrary, St. Paul appeals to the Galatians themſelves, as in a matter of fact which could not be conteſted, that miracles were only wrought, and the extraordinary gifts of the ſpirit communicated, in atteſtation to that true doctrine of the goſpel which he had preached, and not to that *other goſpel*, as he calleth it, which the falſe teachers would have impoſed upon them, Gal. iii. 2. 5. But I have elſewhere conſidered this matter at large, and ſhall not here repeat what was there offered*.

But what our author chiefly bends himſelf to prove is, that the accounts given us of the miracles recorded in the New Teſtament are falſe or uncertain, and not at all to be depended on. To this purpoſe he mentions ſeveral of our Saviour's miracles, and repeats the ſame objections againſt them that had been urged by Mr. Woolſton before, and to which ſolid anſwers had been re-

* See Divine Authority of the Old and New Teſtament aſſerted, vol. i. p. 380—387.

turned.

turned. Every thing in the evangelical accounts that appears to him ſtrange or extraordinary, he rejects at once. I cannot here enter into a diſtinct conſideration of the ſeveral particulars he allegeth. I ſhall only mention one, on which he ſeems to lay a greater ſtreſs than any of the reſt, and which he inſiſts upon more than once, as alone ſufficient to deſtroy the credit of the evangelical hiſtorians. It relates to the account given of our Saviour's temptations in the wilderneſs. It will be readily owned, that the fact referred to is of a very extraordinary nature. But a thing may be very ſtrange and wonderful, and yet very true, and is to be received as ſuch, if it comes to us vouched by a ſufficient authority: and in this caſe the authority is ſufficient; for I think it cannot reaſonably be doubted, that the account came originally from our Lord himſelf, ſince no other could be ſuppoſed to know it, and that it was well known to the apoſtles and diſciples to have come from him. It is diſtinctly related by two of the evangeliſts, St. Matthew and St. Luke, and referred to by a third, St. Mark. St. John, according to the method he purſues, of inſiſting chiefly upon things not mentioned by the reſt, had no occaſion to take notice of it. There is not the leaſt reaſon to ſuppoſe, that the evangeliſts would have inſerted ſuch an account as this, if they had not been aſſured that the information came from Chriſt himſelf; and his authority is a ſufficient warrant for believing it; nor is our author able to prove, that there is any thing here aſcribed to Satan, which he might not be able, or might not be permitted to perform. In what manner he pretended to ſhew to our Saviour, *all the kingdoms of the world, and all the glory of them*, we are not told; nor is there any neceſſity here of taking the word *all* in the ſtricteſt ſenſe. But in what way ſoever this was done, concerning which we cannot pretend certainly to judge, this writer doth not know enough of the caſe to pronounce it impoſſible. Suppoſing there are evil ſpirits, can any man take upon him poſitively to determine how far their power and ability may extend? And that there are both good and evil ſpirits ſuperior to man, hath been the general belief of mankind in all nations and ages, and even of the beſt and wiſeſt of men; nor can a ſhadow of reaſon be brought to prove the exiſtence of ſuch ſpirits to be either impoſſible or improbable, though our author, in his great wiſdom, has all along rejected all

accounts

accounts where there is any mention made of angels or devils, with as much confidence, as if he could clearly demonſtrate that there cannot poſſibly be any ſuch thing.

He frequently ſpeaks of the weakneſs and credulity of the ſacred hiſtorians, and repreſents the accounts given in the goſpels, and in the Acts of the Apoſtles, as mere fictions, *more like Jewiſh fables, or popiſh legends, than real facts**. He expreſsly declares, "that ſome of the popiſh miracles, though generally re-"jected by Proteſtants as fraud and impoſture, are better atteſted "than any of the miracles which were wrought, or ſuppoſed to be "wrought, in the firſt century: and that had the like ſtrict ſcru-"tiny been made in former times that is at preſent, thoſe ancient "miracles would have been rejected†." But every thinking perſon will eaſily ſee a mighty difference in the caſe between miracles wrought before perſons highly prejudiced in their favour, and in proof of the reigning religion, where power and intereſt is on their ſide, and where there is not a full liberty allowed to make a ſtrict inquiry in the view of enemies themſelves, and where the public prejudices lie on the other ſide, and power, intereſt, and authority are engaged againſt them. There will always be ground of ſuſpicion in the former caſe, not equally ſo in the latter. The miracles ſaid to be wrought by the Romiſh church are done in countries where popery is the eſtabliſhed religion, and have power and the prejudices of the people, and an evident worldly intereſt, on their ſide: and they are not performed openly in the view of Proteſtants and for their conviction, in places where there is a full liberty of examining into all the circumſtances relating to them: whereas the miracles whereby Chriſtianity was eſtabliſhed were done openly, and in the view of enemies, able and willing to have detected the impoſture, if there had been any; they were done to eſtabliſh a ſcheme of religion, the moſt oppoſite that could be imagined to the prevailing prejudices both of Jews and Gentiles, and even to the prejudices that had poſſeſſed the minds of the very perſons by whom theſe miracles were wrought; and when all the power and authority of the world, as well as the influence and artifices of the prieſthood, and every worldly advantage, lay wholly on the other ſide: and yet vaſt numbers were

* Chubb, ubi ſupra. p. 192, 193. † Ibid. p. 226, 227.

brought

brought over to receive a crucified Jeſus as their Saviour and their Lord, in that very age, by the evidence of thoſe miracles and extraordinary facts, concerning which they had the beſt opportunity of being informed, in oppoſition to all their worldly intereſts, and their moſt inveterate prejudices. In vain then it is to inveigh, as this writer does, againſt the hiſtorians, and to pretend, that "they were weak enough to give credit to any re-"lations they might pick up, and had courage enough to put upon "the world whatever might be put upon them*:" for the things related by them are of ſuch a public nature, that if they had been falſe, it would have been the eaſieſt thing in the world for their enemies, of whom there were many, to have detected them; which would have cruſhed this religion in its infancy. Our author himſelf is ſenſible how difficult it would have been to impoſe facts of ſo extraordinary and ſo public a nature, as thoſe recorded in the goſpels, and in the Acts of the Apoſtles, in the very age in which the facts were ſaid to be done; and therefore, without ſo much as attempting to offer the leaſt proof, takes upon him to affirm, that the accounts of theſe facts were not publiſhed till a long time after, when there was nobody alive that could contradict them; and he declares as poſitively as if he could prove it to be ſo, that they were not made public till the ſecond century, which he repreſents as an age of fiction and forgery. This is what he particularly affirms concerning the accounts given in the Acts of the Apoſtles; though it is evident from the book itſelf, that it was written in the apoſtolical age, and before the ſecond impriſonment or the death of St. Paul. In the ſecond century, Chriſtianity had already made a wonderful progreſs through the nations, of which there are unqueſtionable proofs: and by a ſtrange abſurdity he ſuppoſes, that the extraordinary facts whereby the Chriſtian religion was atteſted and confirmed, were not publiſhed till that time, *i. e.* that they were not heard of or made public, till long after the founding of the Chriſtian church, though it was wholly upon the credit of thoſe facts that the Chriſtian church was founded. He pretends farther, that the accounts of theſe things "were kept as a treaſure in the hands of believers, "not known to unbelievers, who therefore had it not in their

* Chubb's poſthumous Works, p. 194.

"power

"power to confute them, or detect the fraud*:" and yet certain it is, that the apoſtles went every-where preaching the religion of Jeſus to an unbelieving world. All thoſe to whom the firſt publiſhers of Chriſtianity preached the goſpel, and publiſhed the accounts of the important facts on which it was founded, were at firſt unbelievers: and it was upon the convincing aſſurance they had of the truth of theſe facts, that they were brought over to embrace it, and of unbelieving Jews or heathens became Chriſtians, or believers in Jeſus Chriſt. And whereas he adds, that "thoſe facts were not publiſhed at or near the place of the "performance, but in Greece, Italy, &c. where the people "could not contradict them;" he ſeems not to have conſidered, that all theſe things were firſt publiſhed in Judea, where the firſt Chriſtian churches were founded; and that great numbers of Jews were converted in the places where all the facts were done. It was not till after they had been publiſhed ſome years in Judea, that they were made known to the Gentiles. And in all thoſe countries where the goſpel was preached, there were vaſt numbers of Jews, who had a continual correſpondence with thoſe in Judea, and went frequently to Jeruſalem to the public feaſts, and could therefore eaſily procure information whether thoſe facts were as they had been repreſented.

I ſhall not need to make any obſervations upon what Mr. Chubb hath offered againſt the accounts given by the evangeliſts of our Lord's reſurrection: for, as he has only enlarged on ſome of the ſame objections which had been advanced by the author of *The Reſurrection of Jeſus conſidered*, it may be ſufficient to refer to what has been ſaid on this ſubject in the twelfth letter.

Having conſidered the attempts made by Mr. Chubb to invalidate the argument in behalf of divine revelation from prophecy and miracles, it will not be improper to take ſome notice of what hath been offered to take off the force of the argument, which he hath frequently urged, from the wonderful propagation of Chriſtianity, in behalf of its divine original. He acknowledgeth, that "it is improbable that Chriſtianity ſhould take place, "and prevail in the world, and to the degree it did, or at leaſt "that we are told it did, ſuppoſing the hiſtory of Chriſt's life

* Chubb's poſthumous Works, vol. ii. p. 203, 204, 205.

"and

" and miniſtry to be a fiction*:" but then, as if he had granted too much, he obſerves, that " the preſent run of Methodiſm, " without any miraculous power attending it, or any external " evidence to back it, takes off from the weight and force of the " argument†." He often returns to this, and in ſeveral parts of his book ſeems willing to run a parallel between the progreſs of Chriſtianity and that of Methodiſm. But this only ſhews the ſtrong prejudices of thoſe who glory in the character of free-thinkers, and how forward they are to catch at the ſlighteſt pretences for ſetting aſide the evidences brought in favour of Chriſtianity: for in reality there can be no reaſonable parallel drawn between the one and the other. There is no great wonder in it, that profeſſed Chriſtians, pretending to a high degree of purity and piety, and to teach true ſcriptural Chriſtianity, ſhould make ſome progreſs (not in pagan and mahometan, or even in popiſh countries; for I do not find our Methodiſts take upon them to make many converſions there, but) in a country where ſcriptural Chriſtianity is profeſſed, and a full toleration allowed. There is nothing in this but what may be eaſily accounted for, without ſuppoſing any thing ſupernatural in the caſe. They do not pretend to new extraordinary revelations, nor appeal to any miraculous facts, as the French prophets did; in which caſe the failure of thoſe facts might eaſily ſubject them to a detection; but they build upon the religion already received among us, and only pretend to explain and enforce the doctrines there taught. But the caſe was entirely different with regard to the apoſtles and firſt publiſhers of Chriſtianity. The religion they preached, and eſpecially the great fundamental article of it, the receiving a crucified Jeſus for their Saviour and Lord, was contrary to the moſt rooted prejudices both of Jews and Gentiles: it tended entirely to ſubvert the whole ſyſtem of the pagan ſuperſtition and idolatry, and alſo the pleaſing hopes the Jews had entertained concerning a temporal Meſſiah, who ſhould raiſe their nation to the height of ſecular dominion and grandeur: it was holy and ſelf-denying in its nature and tendency, and was deſigned not to flatter, but to ſubdue and mortify, the corrupt luſts and paſſions

* Chubb's poſthumous Works, vol. ii. p. 40, 41.

† Ibid. marginal note.

of

of men: it appealed to facts of the moſt extraordinary and public nature, and which could not fail being detected, if they had been falſe: the firſt publiſhers of it were not only deſtitute of every worldly advantage, but had the moſt inſurmountable difficulties to encounter with: they were expoſed to the moſt grievous perſecutions, reproaches, and ſufferings, and had all the powers of the world engaged againſt them; that therefore they ſhould be able in ſuch circumſtances to bring over vaſt numbers both of Jews and Gentiles to the faith of the crucified Jeſus, and that the religion they taught ſhould in ſpite of all oppoſition prevail, and at length overturn the whole eſtabliſhed ſuperſtition, which had every worldly advantage to ſupport it; this cannot be reaſonably accounted for, without ſuppoſing the interpoſition of a divine power, and the truth of the extraordinary facts on which it was founded.

Mr. Chubb ſeems to lay a particular ſtreſs *on the great change which*, he pretends, *took place in Chriſtianity, whilſt in its moſt primitive ſtate.* He affirms, that "the apoſtles ſet out upon two "principles, which may be conſidered as the foundation or cor-"ner ſtone of the Chriſtian building. 1. That Chriſtianity is a "ſupplement to Judaiſm, and therefore was to be grafted upon "it; and that the law of Moſes was not to be aboliſhed, but ſtill "continued. 2. That the Goſpel was a favour to be vouch-"ſafed to the Jews only, and that to them only it was to be "preached." And he pretends, that "the apoſtles were una-"voidably led into theſe principles by their maſter himſelf:" but that "in a little time they quite changed the original ſcheme or "plan of Chriſtianity, and dug up and deſtroyed the foundations "they themſelves had laid:" and then he aſks, "How do we know "in what inſtances they may be depended upon? and if they "acted wrong in this, how does it appear that they ever acted "right*?" This he returns to on ſeveral occaſions. But this whole matter is entirely miſrepreſented: it is plain from ſeveral hints given by our Lord himſelf during his perſonal miniſtry, that it was really his intention, and the deſign upon which he was ſent, to erect a new and more perfect diſpenſation than the Moſaical was, though it was not as yet a proper ſeaſon to make

* Chubb's poſthumous Works, vol. ii. p. 84, & ſeq.

a public

a public declaration of it: That his goſpel was to be preached not to the Jews only, but alſo to the Gentiles; and that the latter were to be taken into his church, and to be made partakers of his benefits, and of the great ſalvation he came to procure. Any one will be convinced of this, who impartially conſiders the following paſſages, Matth. viii. 10, 11, 12. xv. 10, 11. xxi. 43. John iv. 21, 23. x. 16. The utmoſt that our author's pretence can be made to amount to, is really no more than this: that the apoſtles, for ſome time after our Lord's aſcenſion, were not entirely freed from their Jewiſh prejudices. And ſuppoſing, which was really the caſe, that the Jewiſh diſpenſation was originally from God, and was deſigned to give way to the more perfect diſpenſation of the goſpel, for which it was preparatory; there was a great propriety in it that the change ſhould not be brought about all at once, which might have been too great a ſhock even to honeſt and well-diſpoſed minds. The gradual method of unfolding the Chriſtian ſcheme, and diſpelling the apoſtles' prejudices, inſtead of being a juſt objection, ſhews that the whole was conducted with a divine wiſdom and goodneſs: and their having continued for ſome time under theſe prejudices, giveth a mighty force to their teſtimony, and furniſheth a manifeſt proof that the Chriſtian diſpenſation was not of their own invention, nor was owing to a ſudden pang of enthuſiaſm; ſince it was with ſuch difficulty that they themſelves were brought to diſcern and embrace it, conſidered in its proper harmony. And it was only owing to the ſtrength of the overpowering light and evidence, that all their prejudices were at length overcome and diſpelled.

Beſides the two principles mentioned above, Mr. Chubb has thought fit to take notice of a third, which he alſo pretends was a fundamental principle of Chriſtianity, as laid down by the apoſtles, *viz.* "That the diſciples of Chriſt were to have one "common ſtock or property, of which the clergy were conſti- "tuted the truſtees and directors:" and he thinks, that "from "this it appears, how groundleſs that pretence muſt be, that the "apoſtles and miniſters of Jeſus Chriſt could have no worldly "advantage in view, when they went forth to preach the goſpel: "whereas nothing can be more evident, than that they had a fair "proſpect of, and a very plauſible pretence for, gathering great "riches into their hands, as keepers and managers of the church's "property or treaſure." This he is ſo fond of, that he inſiſteth

upon it for ſeveral pages together*. And the author of the *Reſurrection of Jeſus conſidered* had hinted at the ſame thing before him, to ſhew, that the apoſtles were intereſted witneſſes, and that therefore their teſtimony to Chriſt's reſurrection is not to be depended on†. But all this is built on a falſe foundation; for there was no divine or apoſtolical conſtitution obliging Chriſtians to put their whole worldly ſubſtance into the common ſtock, and to commit it to the apoſtles as the directors. It appeareth plainly from St. Peter's words to Ananias, that it was a matter which depended entirely on the free choice of the Chriſtian converts, and was the effect of their voluntary zeal and charity; and it was an illuſtrious proof of the ſtrong conviction and perſuaſion they had of the truth of the goſpel, and of thoſe great and extraordinary facts by which Chriſtianity was ſupported. This was the more remarkable, as it was at Jeruſalem that this was done, ſoon after our Lord's reſurrection and aſcenſion, and the extraordinary effuſion of the Holy Ghoſt on the day of Pentecoſt, and where they had the beſt opportunity of knowing the evidences of thoſe facts. But whatever was done this way, in the extraordinary circumſtances in which the firſt Chriſtians were placed, it is manifeſt from ſome paſſages in the New Teſtament, and particularly from St. Paul's directions to the Corinthians, that this was not deſigned to be generally obligatory upon all Chriſtians. See 1 Cor. xvi. 1, 2. 2 Cor. viii. 9. And indeed it ſeems to have been peculiar to thoſe at Jeruſalem; for which undoubtedly there were particular reaſons: and even there, ſo far were the apoſtles from claiming to themſelves the direction of the public ſtock, that they expreſsly refuſed to have any thing to do with the management of it, that they might apply themſelves to their proper work, the miniſtry of the word: and it was given into the hands of perſons of unexceptionable characters, choſen by the Chriſtian ſociety for that purpoſe, that they might impartially diſtribute out of the common ſtock to thoſe that needed it, Acts vi. 1, 2, 3. If the apoſtles had been actuated by worldly views, they would certainly have choſen a ſcheme of religion, more cunningly accommodated to the prevailing humours and prejudices of mankind; for what proſpect could they have of perſuading people to give up their treaſures and worldly ſubſtance

* Chubb's poſthumous Works, p. 102—110.

† Reſurrection of Jeſus conſidered, p. 68.

into

into their hands, by preaching up to the Jews a perſon that had been condemned and crucified by the chief prieſts and rulers of their own nation for their Meſſiah, and preaching up to the Gentiles a crucified Jew for their Lord and Saviour? Our author himſelf is ſenſible of this, and therefore at the ſame time that he talks of the fair worldly proſpect they had, he owns that theſe proſpects muſt have depended upon their expecting ſucceſs in their miniſtry, and upon their being perſuaded that they had God and his promiſes on their ſide, and that Chriſt would be with them, as he had foretold, to the *end of the world**: ſo that, according to his own way of ſtating the caſe, and indeed according to the reaſon of the thing, their proſpect of ſucceſs was founded in the firm belief they had of the truth and divinity of Chriſt's miſſion, and of his reſurrection and exaltation to glory. So inconſiſtent is this writer's hypotheſis, that, in order to make good his charge of worldly intereſted views againſt the apoſtles, he is forced to go upon a ſuppoſition of the truth of the illuſtrious atteſtations that were given to the Chriſtian religion, and which he elſewhere endeavours to invalidate. And yet, ſuppoſing the apoſtles to have believed what their Lord had told them, they could have no worldly advantage to expect; ſince he had aſſured them, that they ſhould be expoſed to all manner of reproaches, perſecutions, and ſufferings, both from Jews and Gentiles, and ſhould be *hated of all men for* his *name's ſake*. And this was actually the caſe: what the apoſtles got by preaching up the religion of Jeſus is in a very affecting manner repreſented by St. Paul, who was one of them: from whence it is manifeſt, that never were there any perſons expoſed to a greater variety of hardſhips and ſufferings, 1 Cor. iv. 9. 11, 12, 13. xv. 19. 32. 2 Cor. iv. 8, 9, 10, 11. xi. 23—28.

It is particularly evident, that this laſt mentioned great apoſtle could have no worldly advantage in view in embracing Chriſtianity. His intereſts, reputation, and prejudices, lay wholly the other way, and tended ſtrongly to bias him againſt it. Nothing but conviction, and the power of evidence, could overcome his obſtinacy; after which he became the moſt eminently inſtrumental to propagate the Chriſtian religion in the world, of which he

* Chubb's poſthumous Works, vol. ii. p. 108, 109.

had been a moſt zealous perſecutor before. And this ſeems to be the cauſe of that peculiar rancour and prejudice which this writer every-where diſcovers againſt him. The beſt judges have admired the ſtrength and cloſeneſs of St. Paul's reaſoning; this particularly was the judgment of one of the beſt reaſoners of the age, Mr. Locke, who ſtudied his writings with great application. But our author has thought fit to repreſent him as a *looſe unguarded writer*, who did *not attend to his own argument, or to the ſubject*. He frequently charges him with drawing wrong concluſions from his premiſes; and that his epiſtles were crude, indigeſted performances, which were *probably ſent as they were firſt wrote, without being reviſed by him;* and that this ſometimes *involved him in confuſion*. He endeavours to give the moſt abſurd and ridiculous turn poſſible to ſeveral paſſages in his writings: ſome inſtances of which were taken notice of above, to which many others might be added. Not content with this, he repreſents this excellent perſon, who was no leſs remarkable for his humility than for his many other virtues, as a vain-glorious boaſter, and treats the account which, with a remarkable modeſty, and as it were by conſtraint, he gives of his labours and ſufferings, as *a bravado, and paſt all belief**. He accuſes him and St. James as guilty of the *moſt groſs and notorious diſſimulation and hypocriſy*, and repreſents him as the great author of *pious frauds* in religion: and that he acted upon this principle, "that truth in ſome caſes may and ought to be diſpenſed with;" and that therefore he and the other apoſtles were capable of giving a *falſe teſtimony to ſerve the Chriſtian cauſe*†. But this certainly was not St. Paul's principle; he has condemned in the ſtrongeſt terms thoſe who maintained, that it is lawful to lie for the glory of God, and *to do evil that good may come of it;* which is the great principle upon which pious frauds are built, Rom. iii. 5, 6. All that Mr. Chubb has advanced, to prove the heavy charge he has brought againſt this great apoſtle, is reducible to two facts. The one is, his ſaying before the council, that *of the hope and reſurrection of the dead he was called in queſtion*, Acts xxiii. 6.; upon which our author obſerves, that in this "he acted a deceitful "part, and coined a lie to ſave himſelf, ſince he was not called

* Chubb's poſthumous Works, vol. ii. p. 364, 365.

† Ibid. p. 92, &c. 235, &c.

"in

" in queſtion about the reſurrection, nor was this any part of " the charge againſt him*." But that the preaching through Jeſus Chriſt the reſurrection of the dead, was one reaſon of the perſecution which was raiſed againſt Chriſt's diſciples; and that this was what particularly excited the rage of the Sadducees againſt them, of which party the high prieſt, or at leaſt many of thoſe about him, and who were men of power and intereſt, appear to have been, is plain from the account given in the Acts of the Apoſtles, chap. iv. 1, 2, 3, v. 17. And it was very allowable for the apoſtle to take advantage of this, for creating a diviſion among his adverſaries, who were not themſelves agreed what charge to bring againſt him. This is a proof of his prudence and addreſs, and that he did not run upon his ſufferings with a blind enthuſiaſtic heat; but it is no proof of his diſhoneſty. The other inſtance upon which the charge of hypocriſy and lying againſt St. Paul is founded, is taken from what he did at Jeruſalem, by St. James's advice, in purifying *himſelf in the temple*, Acts xxi. 20—26†. But if this had been fairly repreſented, it would have appeared, that there was nothing in his conduct on this occaſion inconſiſtent with honeſty and integrity. What the Jewiſh Chriſtians had been informed of concerning St. Paul was, that he had *taught the Jews which were among the Gentiles to forſake Moſes, ſaying that they ought not to circumciſe their children, neither to walk after the cuſtoms*, ver. 21. They repreſented him as having taught, that it was abſolutely unlawful for the Jews to circumciſe their children, or to obſerve the Jewiſh rites. This accuſation was falſe: St. Paul had not taught this; he only had argued againſt the neceſſity of obſerving that law, and had urged Jews and Gentiles to a mutual forbearance with one another in this matter. And what he did purſuant to the advice of St. James, ſhewed that he did not look upon it to be then unlawful to obſerve the Jewiſh rites; and that he judged it both lawful and expedient in ſome caſes to obſerve them, for avoiding ſcandal: and upon this principle he proceeded in circumciſing Timothy. This whole matter had been ſet in a clear light, and the wiſdom and conſiſtency of the conduct of St. Paul and the other apoſtles fully juſtified, in the anſwers that were made to

* Chubb's poſthumous Works, vol. i. p. 330, 331. vol. ii. p. 238.

† Ibid. vol. i. p. 92, 93. 98.

the *Moral Philoſopher*. But Mr. Chubb repeats the charge, without troubling himſelf to take off the force of what had been offered for clearing it.

After what hath been obſerved, it will be no ſurprize to find, that this writer repreſents the being converted to Chriſtianity as of no importance at all, and that he frequently lets us know, that he looks upon all religions to be alike, with regard to the favour of God. "The turning from Mahometaniſm to Chriſtianity," ſays he, "or from Chriſtianity to Mahometaniſm, is "only a laying aſide one external form of religion, and making "uſe of another, which is of no more real benefit, than a man's "changing the colour of his cloaths, by putting off a red coat, "and putting on a blue one in its ſtead*." He elſewhere repreſents it as an indifferent matter, "whether a man adopts Ju-"daiſm, or Paganiſm, or Mahometaniſm, or Chriſtianity;" and what is more extraordinary, he would put this upon us, as St. Peter's ſentiment as well as his own; and endeavours, after his manner, to prove it from that noted paſſage, Acts x. 34, 35. *Of a truth I perceive that God is no reſpecter of perſons; but in every nation, he that feareth him, and worketh righteouſneſs, is accepted with him.* He pretends, that St. Peter here teacheth, "that faith in any religious leader, or his miniſtry, is altogether "ſupernumerary, and that he hath excluded both faith and infi-"delity out of the caſe†:" as if the apoſtle there deſigned to tell Cornelius, that it was of no manner of importance whether he believed in Jeſus Chriſt or not; which is to make him ſpeak in direct contradiction to the very deſign of his being ſent to Cornelius, and of all his ſubſequent diſcourſe to him. St. Peter ſignifieth indeed, in the words cited by this author, that whoſoever in any nation, like Cornelius, truly feared and worſhipped God, and practiſed righteouſneſs, ſhould be accepted of him, though not belonging to the Jewiſh nation, or initiated into the Moſaic polity: but he certainly never intended to ſignify, that the embracing Chriſtianity was a matter of mere indifference. Cornelius's piety and good diſpoſitions would have rendered him acceptable to God, though he had not heard of Chriſt; but when he had an opportunity of being informed, that very piety and fear of God led him to receive thoſe ſignifications of the divine

* Chubb's poſthumous Works, vol. ii. p. 33, 34. † Ibid. vol. i. p. 295—302.

will,

will, and to believe in Jeſus Chriſt, whom he had ſent The great importance and advantage of faith in Chriſt, in ſuch a caſe, is evidently ſuppoſed in St. Peter's whole diſcourſe, who was extraordinarily ſent on purpoſe to inſtruct him in it. This writer thinks proper to find fault with the author of the Acts of the Apoſtles, for laying ſo great a ſtreſs on the converſion of Jews or heathens to Chriſtianity, which, in his opinion, is "of little "conſequence as to the favour of God, or their future ſafety, "becauſe, if they were virtuous and good men, they were ſecure "without ſuch converſion, and if they were bad vicious men, "they were not ſecured by it*." But if they were good men before, and were thereby put in the way of greater improvements in goodneſs, more fully inſtructed in religion, raiſed to more glorious hopes, and furniſhed with more excellent helps, and more powerful animating encouragements to all virtue and univerſal righteouſneſs; or if they were bad men, involved in groſs ignorance and idolatry, ſuperſtition and vice, which was the general character of the heathens when the goſpel appeared, and by turning to Chriſtianity were brought to the knowledge and pure adoration of the only true God, and engaged to forſake their evil ways, and to live ſoberly, righteouſly, and godly *in this* preſent world; and no other were accounted true Chriſtian converts; this, by the author's own acknowledgment, muſt have been a ſignal advantage. He himſelf had ſaid a little before, "if "the revelation referred to could furniſh me with uſeful know-"ledge, or with a better rule of life, or with more powerful ex-"citements to the practice of virtue and true religion, than at "preſent I am in poſſeſſion of, and thereby I ſhould be made "a wiſer and a better man, then I acknowledge, that ſuch con-"viction would be beneficial to me in proportion to ſuch im-"provement†." This is evidently the caſe of the Chriſtian revelation, wherever it is ſincerely believed and embraced, and men give themſelves up to its divine conduct; and therefore thoſe to whom this revelation is offered, and who yet deſpiſe and reject it, are juſtly chargeable with great guilt: for it cannot be a ſlight guilt to reject the valuable means and helps which God hath, in his infinite wiſdom and goodneſs, provided, for promoting our ſpiritual improvement, and engaging and enabling us to

* Chubb's poſthumous Works, vol. ii. p. 33. † Ibid. p. 32.

work out our own ſalvation: nor can any thing be more unreaſonable than to pretend, as the enemies of revelation have often done, that becauſe virtue and righteouſneſs are what God approves, therefore faith is unneceſſary, and of no conſequence at all. The very contrary follows from it: for, if moral improvement and true holineſs be of ſuch vaſt importance, then certainly the beſt and propereſt means for attaining to it are very needful, and to be highly valued; and ſuch are the means and helps which the religion of Jeſus affordeth, as laid down in the Holy Scriptures: and to reject thoſe means and aſſiſtances, under pretence of obtaining the end without them, is a moſt abſurd and criminal conduct, juſtly diſpleaſing in the ſight of God, and a moſt unworthy return to his infinite goodneſs.

I ſhall conclude my remarks on Mr. Chubb's *Poſthumous Works*, with taking notice of a remarkable paſſage at the end of the eighth ſection of his *Farewell to his Readers*. After having done all he could to expoſe the Scriptures, and ſhew that it is not ſafe to appeal to them, he draws this concluſion from the whole: that "this ſhews the great propriety of our returning "back to that prior rule of action, which is the ground and foun-"dation of moral truth, and conſequently of moral certainty; "*viz.* that eternal and invariable rule of right and wrong, as to "an infallible guide, and as the ſolid ground of our peace and "ſafety, which rule we are too eaſily diverted from*." He ſeems to ſpeak here, as if Chriſtians, and thoſe that were for adhering to Scripture as their rule, had no regard to the rule of right and wrong, or to the nature and reaſon of things, which is a groſs miſrepreſentation; and as if the deiſts were under the conduct of an infallible guide. Particularly it is to be ſuppoſed, that he would have it to be underſtood that he himſelf hath taken care to follow the infallible guide he recommends: but if we are to judge by the effect it has had upon himſelf, we have no great encouragement to entertain a very favourable opinion of the advantage we ſhall obtain by forſaking the Scripture, under pretence of following ſuch a guide. For what is it, that his infallible guide has directed him to? It has inclined him to deny a particular providence, or that God now interpoſeth in ordering or governing the affairs of men, and the events relating to them,

* Chubb's poſthumous Works, vol. ii. p. 249.

whether

whether with regard to nations or particular perſons, and conſequently has directed him not to make a dependence on providence, a truſt in God, or reſignation to his will, any part of his religion: it hath taught him not to expect any gracious aſſiſtances from God, or to apply to him for them: it leaveth him at a loſs whether it be proper to pray to God at all, and inclineth him to think that it is the ſafeſt way to let it alone: nor doth this guide inform him, whether mens ſouls are material or immaterial, or whether they ſhall ſubſiſt after death, or ſhall die and periſh with the body, or whether there ſhall be a future ſtate in which God will call men to an account for their actions: or, if there ſhall be a future judgment, his guide leadeth him to apprehend that it ſhall extend but to a ſmall part of the human race, and but to a few of the actions they perform; that they ſhall not be called to an account for the blaſphemies they may have uttered againſt God, or for any neglect of duties that more immediately relate to the Deity, or for private injuries they do to one another, or for any actions at all but thoſe which concern the public; and how far theſe are to extend, he hath not thought fit to inform us. I cannot ſee therefore but that it is much better to follow the light the Scripture affordeth us, which giveth us clear inſtructions in theſe and other things of great importance, concerning which our author's infallible guide, according to his account of the matter, hath given him no directions at all, or hath given him wrong ones.

I have now finiſhed my obſervations on Mr. Chubb's *Poſthumous Works*, which I have perhaps enlarged upon more than they really deſerve. But I have choſen to do it, both becauſe they ſeem to be of a dangerous tendency, and well fitted to do miſchief, and have by ſome perſons been very much extolled, and becauſe there has been no anſwer, that I know of, given to thoſe books. I do not love to make reflections that ſeem to bear hard upon any man's integrity: but I think it cannot be denied, that, notwithſtanding his great pretences to plainneſs and candour, and an impartial love of truth and liberty, there are very apparent marks of great diſingenuity in his writings. The nature of this work would not admit of my entering into a more minute examination; but there are few things of conſequence in his two volumes which are not here taken notice of.

LET-

LETTER XV.

Obſervations upon a Pamphlet, intitled, Deiſm fairly Stated, and fully Vindicated—*The Author's pompous Account of Deiſm, and his Way of ſtating the Queſtion between Chriſtians and Deiſts, conſidered—Concerning the Differences among Chriſtians about the Way of knowing the Scriptures to be the Word of God—The Charge he brings againſt the Chriſtian Religion, as conſiſting only of unintelligible Doctrines and uſeleſs Inſtitutions, and his Pretence, that the Moral Precepts do not belong to Chriſtianity at all, but are the Property of Deiſts. ſhewn to be vain and groundleſs—The Corruptions of Chriſtians no juſt Argument againſt true Chriſtianity—A brief Account of Lord Bolingbroke's Attempt againſt the Scriptures in his* Letters on the Study and Uſe of Hiſtory.

SIR,

HAVING conſidered pretty largely Mr. Chubb's *Poſthumous Works*, I ſhall now ſend you ſome obſervations upon a pamphlet, which, though originally written by another hand, is ſaid to have been reviſed by Mr. Chubb, and to have undergone conſiderable alterations and amendments: it is intitled *Deiſm fairly Stated, and fully Vindicated*, and was publiſhed in 1746. And as it hath been much boaſted of, I ſhall diſtinctly conſider both the account the author of it gives of deiſm, and the attempt he hath made to expoſe the Chriſtian revelation.

In his account of deiſm he treads in the ſteps of Dr. Tindal, and it might be ſufficient to refer to the remarks that have been made upon that writer's ſcheme, of which ſome account was given in the tenth Letter. But let us examine our author's pretenſions more diſtinctly.

He tells us, that "deiſm is no other than the religion eſſential "to man, the true original religion of nature and reaſon*." And becauſe Chriſtian divines have aſſerted, that the goſpel contains the true religion of reaſon and nature, he repreſents them, and

* Deiſm fairly Stated, &c. p. 5.

particularly

particularly the preſent biſhop of London, and Mr. (now Dr.) Samuel Chandler, as acknowledging, that "deiſm is the alone excellence and true glory of Chriſtianity," and pretends that what he has cited from them proves, that "deiſm is all in the "Chriſtian inſtitution that can poſſibly approve itſelf to the true "genuine reaſon of man*." And accordingly he declares, that "every thing that is enjoined in the goſpel to be believed as a "rational doctrine, or practiſed as a natural duty, relating to "God, our neighbours, and ourſelves, *is* an eſtabliſhed part of "deiſm†." And through his whole book he ſuppoſes deiſm to comprehend every doctrine and precept which is founded in reaſon and nature, or, as he ſometimes expreſſeth it, in *truth* and *reaſon*, *i. e.* it comprehendeth every doctrine and precept that *is* true and juſt and reaſonable.

That we may judge of the fairneſs of this writer in ſtating the point, it is proper to obſerve, that the thing he would be thought to vindicate is the religion of thoſe that call themſelves deiſts, and who reject revelation, and oppoſe Chriſtianity. This is the only deiſm in queſtion, and which it concerneth him to ſtate and vindicate. But he has thought fit all along to repreſent deiſm and natural religion as terms of the ſame ſignification; whereas deiſm, as we are now conſidering it, is to be underſtood, not preciſely of natural religion, as comprehending thoſe truths which have a real foundation in reaſon and nature, and which is ſo far from being oppoſite to Chriſtianity, that it is one great deſign of the goſpel to clear and enforce it; but of that religion which every man is to find out for himſelf by the mere force of natural reaſon, independent of all revelation, and excluſive of it. It is concerning this that the inquiry properly proceeds. Dr. Tindal was ſenſible of it; and therefore is for ſending every man to the oracle in his own breaſt as the only guide to duty and happineſs; which alone he is to conſult, without having any regard to revelation: and accordingly he frequently repreſents the religion of nature as ſo clearly known to all men, even to *thoſe that cannot read in their mother tongue*, as to render any farther revelation perfectly needleſs and uſeleſs. But if the queſtion be concerning natural religion in this ſenſe, it is far from deſerving all

* Deiſm fairly Stated, &c. p. 6. † Ibid. p. 7.

the

the fine encomiums which this writer, after Dr. Tindal, ſo liberally beſtows upon it: he repreſents it as ſo perfect, that nothing can be added to it; and therefore will not allow, that Chriſtianity can be ſaid to be "grounded on natural religion, or to be an improvement of it:" for he declares, that he "cannot poſſibly conceive how an entire and perfect ſtructure (which is the caſe of natural religion) can be only a foundation of a perfect ſtructure, or how a perfect religion can be improved*." Here he ſecurely aſſumes the very thing in queſtion, *viz.* that the religion which every man knoweth of himſelf by his own unaſſiſted reaſon is ſo perfect, as to be incapable of receiving any addition or improvement, even from divine revelation: which is in other words to ſay, that every man by his own reaſon, excluſively of all revelation, takes in the whole of religious truth and duty, which is founded in the nature of things, and knows as much of it already as God can teach him: and that a divine revelation can give him no farther light or ſtronger aſſurance, relating to any thing that it is proper for him to believe or practiſe in religion, than what his bare reaſon informs him of without it.

Among the encomiums which our author beſtows upon deiſm, one is, that it is "no other than the religion eſſential to man†;" a phraſe that he and others of the deiſtical writers ſeem fond of. But will theſe ſagacious gentlemen undertake to inform the world what kind or degree of religion is eſſential to the human nature? Or, if they could oblige the world with that diſcovery, is nothing valuable in religion but what is eſſential to man? If revelation diſcovereth to us ſome things of importance which we could not attain to the knowledge of by bare unaſſiſted reaſon; or giveth us farther aſſurances concerning ſome things, as to which we were doubtful before, and ſetteth them in a clearer light; or exhibiteth a more complete ſyſtem of duty; or furniſheth more powerful motives to animate us to the practice of it; muſt all theſe diſcoveries be rejected, under pretence that what we thus receive by revelation is not eſſential to man? Might not all improvements of every kind be diſcarded for the ſame reaſon? And ſo man muſt be left in his pure eſſentials. And then what a fine figure would the human nature make!

* Deiſm fairly Stated, &c. p. 13. † Ibid. p. 513.

Beſides

Beſides this general account of deiſm, our author takes upon him to exhibit ſome fundamental *credenda* of a deiſt; and he might eaſily find a plauſible ſcheme of natural religion formed ready to his hand by Chriſtian writers, and then put it upon the world for pure genuine deiſm. Among theſe fundamental articles of the religion of a deiſt, he reckons the belief of a future ſtate of rewards and puniſhments. But is this a point in which the deiſts are agreed? Lord Bolingbroke every-where ſets up for a deiſt of the firſt rank, and glories in that character, and yet he does all he can to weaken or ſubvert that which is here put upon us as a fundamental article of the deiſtical creed: and Mr. Chubb, who no doubt would paſs with our author for a true deiſt, though ſometimes, like this writer, he makes a great ſhew of believing not only the truth but the importance of that doctrine, yet in ſeveral paſſages of his *Farewell to his Readers*, and eſpecially in his fourth and fifth ſections, where he treats profeſſedly of this ſubject, ſetteth himſelf to ſhew that it is altogether uncertain, and incapable of being proved, and that the probability lies againſt it*. Thus it is that theſe gentlemen are ſometimes willing to make a fair appearance with their principles, till perſons are drawn in, and fully initiated in the myſteries of deiſm.

This author gives us twelve propoſitions with great pomp, moſt of which have nothing to do with the debate between Chriſtians and deiſts, and others of them are very ambiguous†. In his ſeventh propoſition he layeth it down as a principle, that "to govern our conduct by our reaſon is our duty, and all that "God requireth of us." If the meaning be, that God requireth nothing from us but what we know by our bare unaſſiſted reaſon to be our duty, and that if any thing farther be revealed to be our duty, we are not obliged to perform it, becauſe we did not know it to be ſo by our own natural reaſon independently of that revelation, it is falſe and abſurd: for when God requireth us to be governed by our reaſon, it muſt be ſuppoſed to be his intention, that we ſhould take in all proper helps and aſſiſtances. And if he is pleaſed in his great goodneſs to give us additional diſcoveries of his will and our duty for enlightening and aſſiſting our reaſon, then certainly we are obliged, and it is what reaſon itſelf and

* See before, p. 220, & ſeq. † Deiſm fairly Stated, &c. p. 37—40.

the

the religion of nature requireth of us, to pay a regard to thoſe diſcoveries; ſo as to believe the truths which he has been pleaſed to reveal, and to practiſe thoſe duties which he has ſeen fit to enjoin: and not to do ſo would be highly criminal.

The four laſt of his twelve propoſitions are deſigned to ſhew, that reaſon and nature ſufficiently inſtruct us without revelation, as to the methods of reconciliation with the Deity, when we have offended him by our ſins, and give us a certain aſſurance that God will reinſtate us in his favour upon our repentance and reformation. I have elſewhere conſidered this ſubject at large in anſwer to Tindal, who had particularly inſiſted upon it *. At preſent I ſhall only obſerve, that though nature and reaſon ſeem to direct us to repentance and reformation in caſe of our being conſcious of having offended God and tranſgreſſed his holy laws, yet reaſon and nature could not give us certain information, how far repentance ſhall be available to avert the puniſhment we had incurred, or what ſhall be the extent of the divine forgiveneſs, or how far an obedience like ours, mixed with many failures and defects, and which falleth ſhort in many inſtances of what the divine law requires, ſhall be rewarded. We do not know enough of God, of the reaſons and ends of the divine government, and of what may be neceſſary for vindicating the authority of his laws, to be able to pronounce with certainty, by the mere light of our own unaſſiſted reaſon, what meaſures his governing wiſdom and righteouſneſs may think fit to take with regard to guilty creatures that have ſinned againſt him. Will any reaſonable man pretend, that God himſelf cannot diſcover any thing to us, which it may be proper for us to know, relating to the methods of his dealings towards us, the terms of our acceptance with him, or the retributions of a future ſtate, but what we ourſelves knew as well before? Or, if he ſhould condeſcend to make diſcoveries to us of this ſort, and give us aſſurances relating to matters of ſuch great importance, ought we not to be thankful for ſuch diſcoveries? eſpecially ſince it is certain in fact, that men in all ages and nations have been under great anxieties and uncertainties about the proper means of propitiating an offended Deity.

* The Anſwer to Chriſtianity as old as the Creation, vol. i. c. 6.

Our

Our author mentions it to the praiſe of deiſm, that "it is that "religion of nature and reaſon, which was believed and prac- "tiſed by Socrates, and thoſe of old," whom he repreſents as having been *ornaments* to human nature*. Thus he ſeems to think it a greater honour to be a diſciple of Socrates than of Jeſus Chriſt. But why are we to be turned back to the religion of Socrates, who have a light ſo vaſtly ſuperior to that which he enjoyed? However he may be juſtly commended for having attained ſo far, conſidering the circumſtances he was under (though in many things he fell in with the eſtabliſhed ſuperſtition of his age and country), is this a reaſon why we ſhould be ſent to that philoſopher to learn a right ſcheme of religion, when we have a far more excellent one in our hands, and recommended by a much higher authority? He was himſelf ſenſible of his need of farther aſſiſtances, and a divine inſtructor; and ſhall we who have that ineſtimable advantage, deſpiſe the light given us from heaven, and be deſirous to return to that ſtate of darkneſs and uncertainty of which he complained, and from which he wanted to be delivered?

The remarks that have been made will help us to judge of thoſe paſſages in which he pretendeth to give the true ſtate of the queſtion between deiſts and Chriſtians. "The ſingle queſtion," ſaith he, "between Chriſtians and deiſts is, whether the belief "of rational doctrines, and the practice of natural duties, are all "that are ſtrictly neceſſary with regard to the divine approba- "tion, and conſequently human happineſs†?" And again, when he profeſſes to come to the point, he ſays, "The grand founda- "tion of the difference between the deiſts and the religious of "all other perſuaſions is, whether any doctrine or precept that "has not its foundation *apparently* in reaſon or nature, can be "of the eſſence of religion, and with propriety be ſaid to be a "religious doctrine or precept‡." Here he ſuppoſes, and it runs through his whole book, that nothing can be properly ſaid to belong to religion, but what plainly appeareth to the underſtanding of every man, without any aſſiſtance from divine revelation, to be founded in nature and reaſon. The queſtion then,

* Deiſm fairly Stated, p. 5. † Ibid. p. 7. See alſo p. 8, 9, 10.
‡ Ibid. p. 14.

though

though not clearly ſtated by this writer, is this: whether God can make any additional diſcoveries in relation to doctrines to be believed, or duties to be practiſed, concerning which we had no certain information by the bare light of unaſſiſted nature and reaſon? And if God hath made ſuch diſcoveries, whether it would not in that caſe be neceſſary, that thoſe to whom theſe diſcoveries are made ſhould believe thoſe doctrines, and practiſe thoſe duties? Whether, becauſe our own natural reaſon did not inform us of them without revelation, therefore when they are revealed to us, we may ſafely and innocently reject them as uſeleſs and unneceſſary, and as not belonging to religion at all? Or, whether reaſon and nature do not require it of us as an indiſpenſable duty, to pay a juſt ſubmiſſion and regard to the ſignifications and diſcoveries of the divine will concerning truth or duty, in whatever way they are made known to us? Theſe are queſtions, which one ſhould think would admit of an eaſy deciſion; ſince nothing could be more abſurd, than to lay it down as a principle, that God can make no farther diſcoveries of truth and duty to be believed and practiſed by us, but what all men know of themſelves by their own unaſſiſted reaſon; or that, if he ſhould, we are not obliged to receive or regard theſe diſcoveries.

It is very uſual with the deiſtical writers, and this author among the reſt, to put the queſtion, whether reaſon or revelation be the beſt guide, as if there were an oppoſition or inconſiſtency between them: but the proper queſtion is, whether reaſon left merely to itſelf, and with the many frailties, corruptions, and defects to which it is now ſubject, or reaſon with the aſſiſtance of divine revelation, be the beſt guide to duty and happineſs? Revelation indeed would be of little uſe, if we were to take his account of it. He tells us, that by "pure revelation muſt be meant, that "which is of ſuch a nature as to be quite out of reaſon's province "to form any judgment about it: That matters ſupernatural are "incapable of an examination by natural reaſon, or of being "approved as reaſonable: And that ſurely no man can be rationally convinced of what lies quite out of the reach of his reaſoning faculties to form any judgment at all about*." This

* Deiſm fairly Stated, p. 2. 24.

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he frequently repeats, and ſeems to value himſelf upon this way of putting the caſe. But it is groſsly miſrepreſented. None of the friends of revelation underſtand by it, that about which we are not capable of forming any judgment at all: on the contrary, they generally agree that we muſt make uſe of our reaſon, both in judging of the evidences of divine revelation, whereby it is proved to be from God, and of the ſenſe and meaning of its doctrines and precepts. But our author thinks fit to play upon the word *ſupernatural*, as if by it were meant that which is abſolutely unintelligible and abſurd: whereas a thing may be ſo far ſupernatural, that we could not have diſcovered it merely by our own reaſon without a divine revelation, and yet, when diſcovered to us, we may be able to form a judgment concerning it, and may ſee it to be worthy of God, and of an excellent tendency, and as ſuch our reaſon may approve it.

Having conſidered that part of the pamphlet in which the author pretends to give a fair ſtate and vindication of deiſm as oppoſed to revelation, I ſhall now take ſome notice of what he hath advanced with regard to the Chriſtian revelation in particular.

He ſays, "the material queſtion between rational Chriſtians "and deiſts depends upon the proof that is made by Chriſtians, "that the Scriptures are a divine revelation, and the very word "of God: for if this point be proved, the controverſy is at an "end." But here he complains of the want of unanimity among Chriſtians, in a point of ſuch importance. "The Roman Catho- "lics ſay, We know the Scriptures to be the word of God only "by the teſtimony of the church: and among proteſtants, ſome "ſay, They are known to be the word of God by *themſelves*, to "thoſe only whoſe eyes the ſpirit of God is pleaſed to open, to "perceive the characters of divine truth impreſſed on them: "others maintain, that they will manifeſtly appear to be the "word of God by themſelves, upon an honeſt inveſtigation of "mere natural reaſon, to any man who ſhall impartially exerciſe "it about them*." But if the matter be rightly conſidered, there is not ſo great a difference among Chriſtian writers about the way of knowing the Scriptures to be the word of God, as is pretended. Chriſtians in general are agreed, that the extraordi-

* Deiſm fairly Stated, p. 16—24.

nary facts recorded in the gospel are true, and that those facts prove the divine mission of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the truth and divinity of that scheme of religion which was published to the world in his name. They agree, that the Scriptures contain a faithful and authentic account of the doctrines and laws delivered by Christ and his apostles, and of the illustrious attestations whereby they were confirmed: That they were committed to writing by the apostles themselves, who were eye and ear witnesses of what they relate, or by their most intimate companions, and were published in the first age of the Christian church, the age in which those doctrines and laws were delivered, and the facts were done: That these writings have remarkable internal characters of truth and divinity in the goodness and excellence of the doctrines, the purity of the precepts, the force and power of the motives, that unaffected simplicity and impartial regard to truth which every-where appears, and in the admirable tendency of the whole to promote the glory of God, and the good of mankind, without any traces or views of worldly policy, ambition, avarice, or sensuality. And though some talk of these characters as discernible by the aid of the Holy Spirit, and others by the investigation of human reason, yet neither do the former intend to exclude human reason from having any concern in that inquiry, nor do the latter design to exclude the assistance of the Holy Spirit; since it is generally acknowledged among Christians, and is highly agreeable to reason itself, that it is proper to apply to God, *the author of light, and giver of all inward illumination*, as Lord Herbert calls him, to assist us in our inquiries, and, by purifying our souls from vicious affections and corrupt prejudices, to prepare our minds for a due reception of religious and moral truth. I add, that though some have talked of corruptions in the sacred writings, yet Christians are generally agreed, that the Scriptures are transmitted to us without any such general corruption as to make any alteration in the doctrines and facts, and that they are delivered down to us by a credible uninterrupted tradition, greater than can be produced for any other books in the world; by the testimony not merely of the church in one age, but in every age, from the time in which they were written; and not merely by any one party of Christians, but by those of different sects and parties, by friends and enemies. Any

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one that conſidereth the ſeveral things now mentioned, and which have been often urged by Chriſtians of all denominations, by the beſt of the Popiſh as well as Proteſtant writers, who have appeared in defence of Chriſtianity, will ſee that there is a more general agreement among them, in what concerneth the proofs of the divine original and authority of the ſacred writings, than our author ſeems willing to allow.

With regard to *prophecy* and *miracles*, which are inſiſted on by all Chriſtian writers as proofs of the divinity of the Chriſtian religion, he will not allow them to be any proofs of it at all: becauſe they do not prove, that "the collection of tracts commonly called the Bible were written by the perſons reſpectively "whoſe names they bear; that the Deity immediately dictated "to each writer the ſubject matter contained therein: and that "theſe books have been faithfully tranſmitted down to us without any corruption, alteration, addition, or diminution*." Mr. Chubb has the ſame thought, and ſeems very fond of it, for he has it over and over again in his *Farewell to his Readers*. But if prophecies and miracles exhibited ſufficient credentials to the divine miſſion of our Lord Jeſus Chriſt and of his apoſtles, who publiſhed to the world the doctrines and laws of the Chriſtian religion; and if the Scriptures contain a juſt and faithful account of thoſe prophecies and miracles, and of the doctrines and laws ſo atteſted and confirmed, and delivered by thoſe divinely-authoriſed teachers; doth not this lay a juſt foundation for receiving thoſe doctrines and laws as of divine authority? As to their being written by the perſons whoſe names they bear, and their being ſafely tranſmitted to us, without any material corruption or alteration, this needeth no miracles to prove it: it muſt be proved by other mediums, ſuch as by the acknowledgment of all mankind are ſufficient to prove things of that kind. If theſe writings can be traced up, as they certainly may, from our own times, by unqueſtionable evidence, to the very age in which they were written; and if they have been all along acknowledged to have been written by thoſe to whom they are aſcribed, and even the enemies who lived neareſt thoſe times never conteſted it; and if it can be demonſtrated, that, as the

* Deiſm fairly Stated, p. 22. 26.

caſe was circumſtanced, a general corruption of thoſe writings in the doctrines and facts, if any had attempted it, would have been an impoſſible thing; this ought to ſatisfy an impartial inquirer: and this is capable of as clear a proof as the nature of the thing can admit, and which, as hath been already hinted, is ſuperior to what can be produced for any other book in the world. And the man that would doubt of ſuch evidence in any other caſe, would be looked upon as ridiculouſly ſcrupulous, and be thought to carry his ſcepticiſm to an unreaſonable height.

As to the ſubject matter of the Chriſtian revelation, this writer is for ſtripping it of every doctrine that is founded in nature and reaſon; though there are ſeveral important doctrines of that kind, *e. g.* thoſe relating to the attributes and providence of God, and a ſtate of future retributions, which Chriſtianity was manifeſtly intended to confirm and eſtabliſh, and ſet in a clearer light. If we are to take his account of it, it conſiſteth wholly of *ſpeculative, metaphyſical, unintelligible* doctrines, which lie out of the reach of reaſon to determine whether they be true or falſe, or to paſs any judgment at all about them; and of poſitive inſtitutions, which he pretends by the confeſſion of Chriſtian divines are no *conſtituent parts of religion**. By ſaying they are no conſtituent parts of religion, he evidently intends, that they have nothing to do with religion, and are of no uſe or ſignificancy at all: whereas the divines he refers to agree, that the poſitive inſtitutions of Chriſtianity do belong to religion as valuable inſtrumental duties, which have a tendency to ſubſerve and promote the great ends of all religion, and are, when rightly improved, of ſignal uſe and benefit.

After having obſerved, that many parts of Scripture are *myſterious* and *unintelligible*, he ſaith, that to ſuppoſe that God *gives forth unintelligible inſtructions and propoſitions to his creatures, is to prove him in fact a mere trifler*†. And he urges, that "as "certain as a being of perfect rectitude has given a revelation, "ſo certain it is, that not any thing in that revelation can be found "on a ſtrict inquiry unrevealed, *i. e.* not underſtood by men of "learning, penetration, diligence, and induſtry‡." The deſign

* Deiſm fairly Stated, p. 2. 6. 16. 24. 58. † Ibid. p. 26. 34. ‡ Ibid. p. 83.

of

of this is to infinuate, that if there be any one thing in the bible, even in the prophetical parts of it, which is not underſtood by men of learning and diligence, the whole is falſe: or if there be any circumſtance in the revelation obſcure, it cannot be a true divine revelation. But may it not reaſonably be ſuppoſed, that in a revelation deſigned not merely for any one particular age, but for the uſe of mankind in every ſucceeding age, as there are many things, and thoſe of the greateſt importance, ſufficiently clear and intelligible at all times, ſo there may be ſome things not well underſtood at one time, which afterwards are cleared up by farther inquiry, or a more diligent ſearch, or by comparing predictions with events? Or, may not things which are revealed to us as far as it is neceſſary they ſhould be ſo, yet have ſome things attending them, the manner of which we are not able clearly to explain and underſtand? Is not this the caſe of many important points of what is called natural religion, relating to the providence and attributes of God, the divine eternity, immenſity, omniſcience, the creation of the world, &c.? And muſt we reject what we do underſtand, and the great uſefulneſs of which we clearly apprehend, becauſe there is ſomething relating to it which we cannot diſtinctly conceive?

As to the objections he makes againſt ſome particular doctrines of Chriſtianity, as unintelligible and abſurd, or at leaſt as abſolutely uſeleſs, this entirely depends upon the ſtrange and unfair repreſentation he has been pleaſed to make of them. Thus he ſuppoſes Chriſtians to maintain it as a doctrine of Scripture, that "an original, uncompounded, immaterial, and pure ſpirit, ſhould, "like one of the derived, compounded, material, human ſpecies, "have a Son†:" As if Chriſtians underſtood God's having a Son, in the ſame groſs, literal, and carnal ſenſe, in which one man begets another.

He pronounces, that "the ſuppoſed ſatisfaction for ſin by "Chriſt's death, is a doctrine entirely repugnant to reaſon, and "as ſuch ought to be rejected with ſcorn*." Mr. Chubb has paſſed the ſame cenſure upon it, which is owing to the abſurd light in which he has thought fit to repreſent it, concerning which ſee before, p. 238. But the doctrine of our redemption

* Deiſm fairly Stated, p. 66. † Ibid. p. 41.

and reconciliation through the obedience and ſufferings of our Lord Jeſus Chriſt, conſidered as taught in the holy Scriptures, hath nothing in it but what is worthy of God, and of an excellent tendency.

He mentions another doctrine, which he owns to be intelligible enough, but repreſents it as good for nothing, and as of no more conſequence to the world in general, than there being a burning mountain in the kingdom of Naples, is an advantage to the people of England. And he thinks "it is greatly improbable, "that God ſhould eſpecially interpoſe to acquaint the world with "what mankind would do altogether as well without*." The doctrine he here refers to is that of God's judging the world by Jeſus Chriſt. But this, rightly conſidered, is a noble part of the goſpel ſcheme, and capable of being improved to the moſt excellent purpoſes. It renders the whole harmonious and conſiſtent, in that the ſame glorious and divine Perſon by whom God made the world, and by whom as the great inſtrument he carried on his gracious deſigns for recovering mankind from their ruinous and loſt eſtate, is appointed to be the judge of all men, and diſpenſer of future retributions. And what farther ſhews the propriety of appointing Chriſt to be the judge is, that this is the laſt perfective act of the kingdom and dominion committed to him as Mediator, and that it is to be regarded as a reward of his amazing humiliation and ſelf-abaſement, and of his unparalleled obedience and ſufferings in our nature, in compliance with his heavenly father's will. To which it may be added, that nothing can be fuller of comfort to good men, than that the benevolent Saviour of mankind will judge the world in the father's name; ſince it yields a ſatisfactory proof, that it is the will of God, that the judgment ſhould be conducted, not with the utmoſt rigour of unallayed juſtice, but with great equity, ſo as to make all proper allowances for human weakneſs and infirmity, as far as is conſiſtent with unbiaſſed truth and righteouſneſs. And at the ſame time it hath a manifeſt tendency to ſtrike an awe into the impenitent rejecters of the divine grace and goodneſs, to conſider that they muſt be accountable to that Lord and Saviour whom they rejected and deſpiſed. What a mighty enforcement muſt it give

* Deiſm fairly Stated, p. 35.

to

"to his authority and laws, that he himself shall call us to an account as to our obedience or disobedience to those laws, and will have it in his power to fulfil his own glorious promises to them that believe and obey him, and to execute his awful threatnings against the finally impenitent and disobedient!

There are several other things he repeats which are urged by almost every deistical writer, and which I have had occasion frequently to mention, such as the contradictory interpretations put on several passages of Scripture, different translations, errors of transcribers, &c. But that which he seems to lay a particular stress upon is the corruption of Christians. He speaks of the *abominable wickedness that has rode triumphant* in the Christian world: and that "the Americans have too much reason to consider the coming of Christians and Christianity among them as "the greatest evil and curse that ever befel them*." But if professed Christians have made religion a cover for their ambition, avarice, and cruelty, Christianity is not accountable for this. And whosoever considers the best accounts of the Americans before Christianity came among them; their gross ignorance and barbarity, their human sacrifices, and the abominable vices and customs which prevailed among them†, must be sensible, that if the pure religion of Jesus, as taught in the gospel by Christ and his apostles, had been published and received among them in its genuine purity and simplicity, it would have been the happiest thing that could have befallen them: and the greatest fault is, that little care has been taken to instruct them and the other heathen nations, in the true Christian religion as delivered in the holy Scriptures. Notwithstanding the corruptions so complained of in the Christian world, it is undeniable, that what there is of knowledge and true religion among men, is principally where Christianity is professed. But if all were true that is pretended concerning the depravity of those that call themselves Christians, it would only prove, that they are very much fallen from the religion they profess, but not that Christianity itself is false, or was not originally from God. Whilst it can be shewn, as it may be with the utmost evidence, that considered in itself, and as contained in the Scriptures, it is of the most excellent tendency, and

* Deism fairly Stated, p. 47, 48.

† See Bayle's Dictionary, under the article Leon [Peter Cuccade].

that the uniform deſign of its doctrines, precepts, promiſes and threatnings, is to promote the cauſe of virtue and righteouſneſs in the world, and to reclaim men from vice and wickedneſs; it is certainly very unreaſonable and unfair to make Chriſtianity anſwerable for the abuſes and corruptions it condemneth. If every thing muſt be rejected which hath been abuſed, government and civil polity, knowledge and literature, religion, liberty, and reaſon itſelf muſt be diſcarded.

One of the moſt remarkable things in the tract we are now conſidering is, that the author will not allow that the moral precepts of Chriſtianity properly belong to it at all, or make any part of the Chriſtian religion. He pretends, that Chriſtian divines, in order to render Chriſtianity amiable, have decked her with the graceful ornaments of moral precepts; whereas in Chriſtianity the moral precepts are but borrowed ware, the property of the deiſts, and as much diſtinguiſhed from Chriſtianity, as Chriſtianity is from Mahometaniſm. Thus he hath found out an admirable expedient to ſtrip Chriſtianity of what hath been hitherto eſteemed one of its principal glories. The holy and excellent precepts which the great Author of our religion taught and enjoined in the name of God, and to enforce which by the moſt weighty and important motives was one great deſign of his and his apoſtles' miniſtry, do not, it ſeems, belong to Chriſtianity at all. Moral precepts, according to this writer, make no part of divine revelation, and of the ſcheme of religion delivered in the Goſpel; though to clear and ſhew them in their juſt extent, and enforce them by a divine authority, and by the moſt prevailing motives, ſeems to be one of the nobleſt ends for which a divine revelation could be given to mankind. Suppoſing, which was really the caſe, that the world was ſunk into an amazing darkneſs and corruption, there was nothing that was more wanted than to have a pure ſyſtem of morals, containing the whole of our duty with reſpect to God, our neighbours, and ourſelves, delivered not as the opinions of wiſe men and philoſophers, but as the laws of God himſelf, and enforced by all the ſanctions of a divine authority, and by all the charms of the divine grace and goodneſs. This is what hath been done by the Chriſtian revelation; and its great uſefulneſs to this purpoſe, and the need the world ſtood in of it, is excellently repreſented by Mr. Locke,

Locke, in his *Reaſonableneſs of Chriſtianity**, quoted at large by Dr. Benſon in his remarks on this pamphlet, who very juſtly obſerves, that this great man had fully obviated before-hand all that the author of *Deiſm fairly Stated* hath advanced on this ſubject.

The laſt argument he urgeth againſt the Chriſtian revelation is drawn from its not having been univerſally ſpread in all ages and nations. I ſhall not ſay any thing here to this objection, which hath been often repeated and anſwered. It had been particularly inſiſted upon by Dr. Tindal, and was fully conſidered in the anſwers that were made to him. Some notice was taken of it in the obſervations on Lord Herbert's ſcheme†. And it may be obſerved, as Mr. Chubb himſelf ſeems to think, that no great ſtreſs ſhould be laid upon it; and he will not take upon him to affirm, that the non-univerſality of a revelation is a juſt objection againſt its divinity‡.

Soon after *Deiſm fairly Stated*, &c. appeared, Dr. Benſon publiſhed animadverſions upon it, in the ſecond edition of the *Reaſonableneſs of Chriſtianity as delivered in the Scriptures*, London, 1746: To which there is added an appendix, in which he ſolidly vindicates the arguments he had offered in his *Reaſonableneſs of Chriſtianity*, &c. againſt the exceptions of this writer, and charges him not only with falſe reaſonings, but with groſs miſrepreſentations. The ſame charge is urged againſt him in a tract publiſhed by the reverend Mr. Capel Berrow, though without his name, intitled, *Deiſm not conſiſtent with the Religion of Nature and Reaſon*:—"wherein are obviated the moſt popu-"lar objections brought againſt Chriſtianity, thoſe eſpecially "which are urged by a moral philoſopher, in a late extraordinary "pamphlet, ſtyled *Deiſm fairly Stated, and fully Vindicated*, in "a letter to a friend—London, 1751." There were other anſwers to *Deiſm fairly Stated*, which I have not ſeen. I ſhall conclude my reflections upon it with obſerving, that this pamphlet furniſhes remarkable inſtances to verify the obſervation I had occaſion to make before§ concerning the unfair conduct of the deiſtical writers, and the ſtrange liberties they take in miſrepreſenting the ſenſe of the Chriſtian writers whom they quote.

* Locke's Works, vol. ii. p. 575—579. 4th edit.

† See above, p. 20, & ſeq.

‡ Chubb's poſthumous Works, vol. i. p. 218, 219.

§ See above, let. vii. p. 90. note.

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It may not be improper here to take ſome notice of the attempt made againſt the authority of the ſacred writings in the late Lord Bolingbroke's *Letters on the Study and Uſe of Hiſtory*. In ſome of theſe letters he hath uſed his utmoſt efforts to ſubvert the credit of the ſcripture hiſtory; but the method he has made uſe of to this purpoſe ſeems not to be well choſen, nor conſiſtent with itſelf. A principal reaſon which his Lordſhip produces to invalidate the credit and authority of the Old Teſtament hiſtory is, that the Greeks were not acquainted with it; and that their accounts, particularly with regard to the Aſſyrian empire, do not agree with the accounts given of it in Scripture. And yet he himſelf has taken great pains to ſhew, that the ancient Greeks were fabulous writers, and that their accounts of ancient times, either with regard to other nations, or their own, are not to be depended on: and accordingly he hath let us know, that if they had perfectly agreed with the accounts given in the Jewiſh Scriptures, he would have had very little regard to them, and would not have looked upon this to be any argument of their truth. Many learned writers have produced teſtimonies from heathen authors, tending to ſtrengthen ſome remarkable paſſages in the ſcripture hiſtory. This his Lordſhip finds great fault with, and chargeth it as a moſt partial and abſurd conduct to admit the teſtimony of the heathen writers, if they happen at any time to agree with the ſcripture accounts, and to reject their teſtimony when againſt them. But if the matter be fairly weighed, there is nothing in this but what is very reaſonable: for, conſidering the ſtrong prejudices of the heathens againſt the Jews, whoſe whole religion and policy were ſo oppoſite to theirs, it is evident that no great ſtreſs can be laid upon what they ſay againſt them, and their hiſtory; and yet if any thing be found in their writings, which tendeth to confirm the facts recorded in the Jewiſh ſacred books, it is juſt to take advantage of this; ſince it is plain this could not be owing to a favourable prepoſſeſſion towards the Jews, or their hiſtories, but to the force of truth, or to ſome traditions which they looked upon as authentic. For though the teſtimonies of enemies are not much to be regarded, when they are to the prejudice of thoſe for whom they have a declared averſion, yet the teſtimony of enemies in favour of thoſe to whom they are known to be enemies, has been always looked upon to be of great weight.

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In order to invalidate the ſcripture hiſtory, his Lordſhip has thought fit to repeat what had been often mentioned by the writers on that ſide: That the Jewiſh ſacred books were loſt in the Babyloniſh captivity; that there have been ſuch corruptions and alterations in the copies, that there can be no dependence upon them; that there is no proof of the Goſpels having been written in the apoſtolic age; that they were not diſtinguiſhed from the ſpurious goſpels; that there had been formerly evidence againſt Chriſtianity, but that it was deſtroyed; that the Chriſtian clergy, through whoſe hands the Scriptures have been tranſmitted to us, were guilty of numberleſs frauds and corruptions; and that the many differences among Chriſtians about the ſenſe of Scripture ſhew, that it is abſolutely uncertain; and that there is now no certain ſtandard of Chriſtianity at all. Theſe and other objections, which his Lordſhip hath diſplayed with no ſmall oſtentation, I ſhall not here take any particular notice of, having conſidered and obviated them in the *Reflections on Lord Bolingbroke's Letters on the Study and Uſe of Hiſtory, eſpecially as far as they relate to Chriſtianity and the Holy Scriptures*, publiſhed at London, 8vo. 1753*. About the ſame time, the Right Reverend the Lord Biſhop of Clogher publiſhed *A Vindication of the Hiſtories of the Old and New Teſtament, in Anſwer to the Objections of the late Lord Bolingbroke:* in which he hath both detected and expoſed ſeveral miſtakes his Lordſhip had fallen into with reſpect to other ancient authors whom he cites, and hath vindicated the ſacred writings againſt the attempts made in thoſe Letters to invalidate their credit and divine authority.—Theſe, with Mr. Harvey's *Remarks on Lord Bolingbroke's Letters, as far as they relate to the Hiſtory of the Old Teſtament*, are the only anſwers I have ſeen to his Lordſhip's *Letters on the Study and Uſe of Hiſtory*. But we ſhall ſoon have occaſion to return to this noble Lord, who afterwards in his poſthumous works appeared ſtill more openly againſt the Chriſtian cauſe, and even againſt what have been hitherto accounted ſome of the moſt important principles of natural religion.

* Theſe Reflections are to be found in the ſecond volume of this work, to which the reader is referred.

LETTER XVI.

Mr. Hume, a ſubtile and ingenious Writer, but extremely ſceptical and fond of Novelty—He propoſes to free Metaphyſics from that Jargon and Obſcurity which has ſerved only as a Shelter to Superſtition and Error—His Doctrine concerning the Relation of Cauſe and Effect examined—He declares, that the Knowledge of this Relation is of the higheſt Importance, and that all our Reaſons concerning Matter of Fact and Experience, and concerning the Exiſtence of any Being, are founded upon it—Yet he ſets himſelf to ſhew, that there is no real Connexion between Cauſe and Effect, and that there can be no certain, nor even probable, Reaſoning from the one to the other—Reflections upon the great Abſurdity and pernicious Conſequences of this Scheme—The Inconſiſtencies this Writer hath fallen into.

SIR,

I NOW ſend you ſome obſervations upon Mr. Hume, an ingenious writer, who hath lately appeared againſt the Chriſtian cauſe, and that in a manner which ſeems to have ſomething new in it, and different from what others had written before him, eſpecially in what he calls his *Philoſophical Eſſays concerning Human Underſtanding*. The ſecond edition of this book, with additions and corrections, which is what I have now before me, was publiſhed in London, 1750. This gentleman muſt be acknowledged to be a ſubtile writer, of a very metaphyſical genius, and has a neat and agreeable manner of expreſſion. But it is obvious to every judicious reader, that he hath in many inſtances carried ſcepticiſm to an unreaſonable height; and ſeemeth everywhere to affect an air of making new obſervations and diſcoveries. His writings ſeem, for the moſt part, to be calculated rather to amuſe, or even confound, than to inſtruct and enlighten the underſtanding; and there are not a few things in them, which ſtrike at the foundation of natural, as well as the proofs and evidences of revealed, religion. This appeareth to me to be, in a particular manner, the character of his *Philoſophical Eſſays:*

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and you will, perhaps, be of the ſame opinion, when you have conſidered the remarks I now ſend you.

If we were to form a judgment of theſe Eſſays, from the account he himſelf is pleaſed to give of them, and of his intention in writing them, our notion of them would be highly to their advantage. Having taken notice of the abſtractedneſs of metaphyſical ſpeculations, he ſays, that he has, "in the following Eſſays, "endeavoured to throw ſome light upon ſubjects, from which "uncertainty has hitherto deterred the wiſe, and obſcurity the "ignorant." He propoſes "to unite the boundaries of the "different ſpecies of philoſophy, by reconciling profound in-"quiry with clearneſs, and truth with novelty;" and thinks "it "will be happy, if, reaſoning in this eaſy manner, he can un-"dermine the foundations of an abſtruſe philoſophy, which "ſeems to have ſerved hitherto only as a ſhelter to ſuperſtition, "and a cover to abſurdity and error*." He undertakes to "ba-"niſh all that jargon, which has ſo long taken poſſeſſion of me-"taphyſical reaſonings, and drawn ſuch diſgrace upon them†." And after having repreſented *all the received ſyſtems of philoſophy*, and all *common theories, as extremely defective*, he promiſes to "avoid all jargon and confuſion, in treating of ſuch ſubtile "and profound ſubjects‡."

That part of theſe Eſſays, which I ſhall firſt take notice of, and which is indeed of a very uncommon ſtrain, and ſeems to lie at the foundation of many of thoſe extraordinary things which he afterwards advances, is what he propoſes to conſider, p. 47, *& ſeq.*; where he obſerves, that "it is a ſubject worthy curioſity, "to inquire what is the nature of that evidence, which aſſures "us of any real exiſtence and matter of fact, beyond the preſent "teſtimony of our ſenſes, or the records of our memory." He obſerves, that "this part of philoſophy has been little cultivated "either by the ancients or moderns:" but though it is difficult, it may be "uſeful, by deſtroying that implicit faith and credulity, "which is the bane of all reaſoning and free inquiry§." After ſuch a pompous profeſſion, one would be apt to expect ſomething extremely deſerving of our attention. Let us therefore

* Hume's Philoſophical Eſſays, p. 18, 19.
† Ibid. p. 27, 28.
‡ Ibid. p. 97. 106, 107.
§ Ibid. p. 47, 48, 49.

examine

examine into his ſcheme, that we may know what it really is; and then our way will be clear to make the neceſſary remarks upon it.

He obſerves, that "the relation of cauſe and effect is neceſ-"ſary to the ſubſiſtence of our ſpecies, and the regulation of our "conduct in every circumſtance and occurrence of human life. "Without this, we ſhould never have been able to adjuſt means "to ends, nor employ our rational powers either to the produc-"ing of good, or avoiding of evil*." And, accordingly, he expreſsly declares, that "if there be any relation, any object, "which it imports us to know perfectly, it is that of cauſe and "effect: on this we found all our reaſonings, concerning matter "of fact and experience: and by this alone we retain any aſſur-"ance concerning objects that are removed from the preſent "teſtimony of our memory and ſenſes:" and that "the exiſtence "of any Being can only be known by arguments from its cauſe, "or its effect†." It appeareth then, that by his own acknowledgment, it is of the higheſt importance to know the relation of cauſe and effect. Let us now ſee what inſtruction he gives us with regard to that relation.

He abſolutely denies, that this relation can poſſibly be known *a priori*, and aſſerts, that it entirely ariſes from experience‡: that it is this only "that teaches us the nature and bounds of "cauſe and effect, and enables us to infer the exiſtence of one "object from that of another§." But he takes a great deal of pains to ſhew, that experience cannot furniſh a reaſonable foundation for ſuch an inference. He had laid it down as a principle, that all arguments from experience can at beſt only be probable: but he will not allow even this in the preſent caſe: he ſets himſelf to prove, that "not ſo much as any probable ar-"guments can be drawn from cauſe to effect, or from effect to "cauſe‖:" that "the conjunction of the effect with the cauſe "is entirely arbitrary, not only in its firſt conception, *a priori*, "but after it is ſuggeſted by experience**:" that, "indeed, "in fact, we infer the one from the other; but that this is not "by a chain of reaſoning; nor is there any medium which may

* Hume's Philoſophical Eſſays, p. 89, 90.
† Ibid. p. 123. 258.
‡ Ibid. p. 50. 52, 53.
§ Ibid. p. 258.
‖ Ibid. p. 62, 63.
** Ibid. p. 53, 54.

"enable

" enable the mind to draw ſuch an inference*. The only ground " of ſuch an inference, is the ſuppoſed reſemblance between the " paſt and future; but that it is impoſſible any argument from " experience ſhould prove that reſemblance: and yet if there be " not ſuch a reſemblance, all experience becomes uſeleſs, and can " give riſe to no inference or concluſion†." He poſitively aſſerts, that " we know only by experience the frequent conjunc- " tion of objects, without being ever able to comprehend any " thing like connexion between them ‡." And he frequently obſerves, that the connexion is only in our own thoughts or conceptions, not in the things themſelves; and reſolves the conjunction between cauſe and effect, and the inference drawn from the one to the other, wholly into cuſtom; that it is a " cuſtomary " connexion in the thought or imagination betwixt one object, " and its uſual attendant §;" that cuſtom, he always calls *a habit* ‖; and repreſents it as owing to a repetition of acts; at other times, he aſcribes it to an *inſtinct*, or *mechanical tendency*, and repreſents it as a neceſſary *act of the mind*, and *infallible in its operations* **: yet afterwards, ſpeaking of the ſame cuſtom or inſtinct, he ſays, that, like *other inſtincts, it may be fallacious and deceitful* ††.

The great argument he produces, and upon which he lays the greateſt ſtreſs, to ſhew that we can have no certainty in our concluſions concerning the relation of cauſe and effect, nor reaſon from one to the other, is, that we have no idea of that connexion which unites the effect to the cauſe, or of the force, power, or energy, in the cauſe, which produces the effect; nor conſequently, any medium whereby we can infer the one from the other. He ſets himſelf particularly to ſhew, that neither external objects give us the idea of power, nor reflections on the operations of our own minds ‡‡.

If what our author offers on this head had been only to diſplay the ſubtilty of his metaphyſical genius, and ſhew how little we are able diſtinctly to explain the manner even of thoſe things of which we have the greateſt certainty, we ſhould have allowed him

* Hume's Philoſophical Eſſays, p. 60, 61.
‡ Ibid. p. 114.
‖ Ibid. p. 73, 74. 91. 120.
†† Ibid. p. 251.
† Ibid. p. 65, 66.
§ Ibid. p. 123.
** Ibid. 73. 91.
‡‡ Ibid. p. 105, 106.

to

to amuſe himſelf, and his readers, with a little philoſophical play. But what he here advances, concerning cauſe and effect, power and connexion, he makes the foundation of concluſions relating to matters of great importance,

———*Hæ nugæ ſeria ducunt*
In mala———

By endeavouring to deſtroy all reaſoning from cauſes to effects, or from effects to cauſes, and not allowing that we can ſo much as probably infer the one from the other, by arguing either *a priori*, or from experience, he ſubverts, as far as in him lies, the very foundation of thoſe reaſonings, that are drawn from the effects which we behold in the frame of the univerſe, to the exiſtence of one ſupreme, intelligent, all-powerful cauſe; and accordingly we ſhall find that he himſelf afterwards applies this principle to this very purpoſe. Another uſe that he makes of this doctrine concerning cauſe and effect is, what we would not have expected from it, to confound all difference between phyſical and moral cauſes; and to ſhew that the latter have the ſame kind of caſuality with the former. This is the purport of his eighth eſſay, which is concerning *liberty* and *neceſſity**: though if he argued conſiſtently, he muſt deny that there is any ſuch thing in nature as *neceſſity*, or *neceſſary connexion*; or that there is either phyſical or moral cauſe at all.

You will ſcarce expect, that I ſhould enter upon a laborious confutation of ſo whimſical a ſcheme, though propoſed to the world with great pomp, and repreſented by the author himſelf as of *vaſt importance*. I ſhall content myſelf with making ſome general obſervations upon it.

And firſt, whereas this writer frequently, throughout theſe eſſays, lays a mighty ſtreſs upon experience, as the great guide of human life, and the only foundation of all other knowledge, eſpecially with reſpect to matter of fact, and the exiſtence of objects, he here plainly endeavours to ſhew, that there can be no argument from experience at all; nor can any reaſonable concluſion be drawn from it: for he will not allow, that argument can be drawn or inference made from experience, but what is founded on the

* Hume's Philoſophical Eſſays, p. 129, & ſeq.

ſuppoſed

ſuppoſed relation or connexion betwixt cauſe and effect. If therefore there be no relation or connexion betwixt cauſe and effect at all, in the nature of things, which it is the whole deſign of his reaſoning on this ſubject to ſhew, then all certainty of experience, all proof from it, entirely fail; all experience, as he himſelf expreſſes it, *becomes uſeleſs, and can give riſe to no inference or concluſion**.

Secondly, Another remark I would make upon Mr. Hume's way of arguing is, that it proceeds upon a wrong foundation, and which is contrary to truth and reaſon, *viz.* that we cannot have any reaſonable certainty of the truth of a thing, or that it really is, when we cannot diſtinctly explain the manner of it, or how it is. The ſum of his argumentation, as I have already hinted with relation to cauſe and effect, is, that we cannot be certain of any ſuch thing as power or energy, becauſe we cannot conceive or explain preciſely wherein it conſiſts, or how it operates. But this is a very fallacious way of reaſoning. Though we cannot metaphyſically explain the manner in which the cauſe operateth upon the effect, yet we may, in many caſes, be ſure that there is a connexion between them; and that where there are certain effects produced, there are powers correſpondent or adequate to the production of thoſe effects. The mind, in ſuch caſes, when it ſees an effect produced, is led, by a quick and undoubted proceſs of reaſoning, to acknowledge that there muſt be a cauſe which hath a power of producing it; or elſe we muſt ſay, that it is produced without any cauſe at all, or that nothing in nature hath any power of producing it; which is the greateſt of all abſurdities. He urgeth, that "it muſt be allowed, that when we know a power, "we know that very circumſtance in the cauſe, by which it is "enabled to produce the effect." And then he aſks, "Do we "pretend to be acquainted with the nature of the human ſoul and "the nature of an idea, or the aptitude of the one to produce the "other†?" But certainly we may know, that there is ſomething in the cauſe which produceth the effect, though we cannot diſtinctly explain what that circumſtance in the cauſe is, by which it is enabled to produce it. We muſt not deny, that there is in the mind a power of raiſing up ideas, and recalling them, and

* Hume's Philoſophical Eſſays, p. 66. † Ibid. p. 110, 111.

fixing the attention upon them, becauſe we cannot explain how this is done. The argument Mr. Hume offers to prove, that we can have no aſſurance of the reality of force or power, *viz.* becauſe we cannot diſtinctly conceive or explain how it operateth, would equally prove, that we cannot be ſure that we have any ideas at all, becauſe we cannot well explain the nature of an idea, or how it is formed in the mind. He himſelf, on another occaſion, obſerves againſt Malebranche, and the modern Carteſians, who deny all power and activity in ſecond cauſes, and aſcribe all to God; that "we are indeed ignorant of the manner in which "bodies operate upon one another; and ſo we are of the manner "or force by which the mind, even the ſupreme mind, operates, "either on itſelf or on body. Were our ignorance therefore a "ſufficient reaſon for rejecting any thing, we ſhould be led into "that principle of refuſing all energy to the Supreme Being, as "much as to the groſſeſt matter*." He here ſeems to cenſure it as a wrong way of arguing, to deny that a thing is, becauſe we cannot diſtinctly conceive the manner how it is; or to make our ignorance of any thing a ſufficient reaſon for rejecting it: and yet it is manifeſt, that his own reaſoning againſt power or cauſality, force or energy, depends upon this principle; and indeed, by comparing the ſeveral parts of his ſcheme, there is too much reaſon to apprehend, that he had it in view to deny all force and energy, and all power whatſoever, in the ſupreme as well as in ſecondary cauſes; or at leaſt to repreſent it as very uncerta n. I think this gentleman would have done better to have ſaid, as a late ingenious author of his own country, "We have no adequate "idea of power; we ſee evidently that there muſt be ſuch a thing "in nature; but we cannot conceive how it acts, nor what con-"nects the producing cauſe with the produced effect." Chevalier Ramſay's principles of natural and revealed religion, vol. i. p. 109.

Thirdly, A third remark is, that many of our author's arguings on this ſubject are contrary to the moſt evident dictates of common ſenſe. Such is that, where he aſſerts, that not ſo much as a probable argument can be drawn, in any caſe, from experience, concerning the connexion betwixt cauſe and effect; or

* Hume's Philoſophical Eſſays, p. 117, 118.

from

"from whence we may conclude, that from a ſimilar cauſe we may expect ſimilar effects*. Thus, *e. g.* according to his way of reaſoning, it cannot ſo much as probably be concluded from experience, that if a quantity of dry gunpowder be laid in any place, and fire be applied to it, it will cauſe an exploſion; or that if it hath ſuch an effect to-day, a like quantity of powder, the ſame way circumſtanced, will produce the ſame effect to-morrow. No probable reaſon can be brought to ſhew, that that which has had the effect in thouſands of inſtances in time paſt, will, though all circumſtances appear perfectly ſimilar, have the ſame effect in time future. He grants, indeed, that, in ſuch caſes, the mind is determined to draw the inference; yet he aſſerts, that the underſtanding has no part in the operation. But ſurely, when, from obſervation and experience, we come to know and judge of the ordinary courſe of nature, the underſtanding may juſtly draw a probable argument or concluſion, that from ſuch and ſuch cauſes, ſo circumſtanced, ſuch effects will follow. This inference is perfectly rational. And it is a ſtrange way of talking, that, even from a number of uniform experiments, we cannot ſo much as probably infer a connexion between the cauſe and the effect, the ſenſible qualities and the ſecret powers. The reaſon he gives, is, that "if there be any ſuſpicion, that the courſe "of nature may change, and that the paſt may be no rule for "the future, experience can give riſe to no inference or con-"cluſion†." But is the probability of a thing deſtroyed, according to any way of reaſoning allowed hitherto, becauſe it is barely poſſible it may happen otherwiſe, though there are ten thouſand to one againſt it? Mr. Hume elſewhere, when arguing againſt miracles, lays it down as a principle, that there is a conſtant uniformity in the courſe of nature, never to be violated; but here, in order to ſhew, that no probable reaſon can be brought from experience, concerning the connexion of cauſe and effect, he ſuppoſes, that there may be a ſuſpicion that the courſe of nature may change. Thus this gentleman knows how to aſſume and alter principles, as beſt ſuits his own preſent convenience. Reaſon leadeth us to conclude, that the courſe of nature is the appointment and conſtitution of that moſt wiſe and powerful

* Hume's Philoſophical Eſſays, p. 61, 62, 63. † Ibid. p. 65, 66.

Being, who made that world, and ſettled that law and order which he judged fitteſt and propereſt; and then reaſon leadeth us alſo to conclude, that, except in very extraordinary caſes, the ſame order will continue; and extraordinary caſes do not hinder the probability of the ordinary courſe. So that reaſon affords a proper medium for a probable concluſion concerning what effects are to be expected. He affirms, indeed, that all inferences of this kind are only the effects of cuſtom or habit, not of reaſoning*. But why is cuſtom or habit here mentioned in oppoſition to reaſon, or as excluſive of it? May they not both concur? It is evident that they often go together, and mutually ſtrengthen one another. Cuſtom alone, without reaſon, is often not to be depended on: but in this caſe reaſon gives its ſuffrage; and, in all arguings in experimental philoſophy, reaſon argues from ſimilar cauſes to ſimilar effects. It is by reaſon we draw thoſe inferences, and the inferences are rational. It muſt not be ſaid, that in this caſe there is no reaſoning at all; but that the reaſoning is often ſo obvious, that it carries conviction by the very conſtitution of the human mind, which naturally acquieſceth in it as ſatisfactory. It ſeems evident, that the great Author of our being hath formed our minds, ſo as to reaſon in this manner; and he would not have done this, if it had not been both of great uſe in human life to make ſuch inferences, and if there were not a real foundation for it in the nature of things. This writer himſelf owns, that "none but a fool or a madman will ever pretend to "diſpute the authority of experience, or to reject that great guide "of human life: but he thinks it may be allowed a philoſopher "to have ſo much curioſity as to examine the principle of human "nature, which gives this weighty authority to experience†." But I cannot help thinking, that if we were to judge of philoſophy by the ſpecimen this gentleman hath given of it in this inſtance, many would be apt to conclude, that there is a great difference, and even oppoſition, between philoſophy and common ſenſe; that what is ſo obvious and apparent to the common ſenſe and reaſon of mankind, that he is a fool and a madman, who doubts of it, yet in philoſophy is not ſo much as probable.

Another inſtance, in which our author's ſcheme is not very

* Hume's Philoſophical Eſſays, p. 73. 74. & paſſim. † Ibid. p. 63. 66.

reconcileable

reconcileable to the common ſentiments of mankind, is, that he ſays, that "though we learn, by experience, the frequent *con-* "*junction* of objects, yet we are unable to comprehend any thing "like *connexion* between them; and that there appears not in "all nature any thing like *connexion*, conceivable by us; all "events are entirely looſe and ſeparate; one event follows ano- "ther; but we never obſerve any tie betwixt them; they ſeem "conjoined, but never connected*." But it is evident, that in many caſes we have a diſtinct idea of conjunction or contiguity, as in a heap of ſand; and of connexion, as betwixt cauſe and effect; and the connexion in this caſe is not merely in our thoughts, as this gentleman is pleaſed to repreſent it; but this very connexion in our thoughts is founded on a connexion which we perceive in the things themſelves. They are not connected as cauſe and effect, becauſe we think them ſo; but we perceive them to be connected, becauſe we find they are ſo: nor is this owing merely to a cuſtom or habit in our minds, but there is in nature a real foundation for it.

Fourthly, Another remark which occurs to me, upon conſidering Mr. Hume's ſcheme, is, that he hath fallen into ſeveral inconſiſtencies and contradictions: and, indeed, it is not to be wondered at, that a man who argueth againſt common ſenſe, however ſubtile and ingenious he may otherwiſe be, ſhould alſo be inconſiſtent with himſelf. I have already taken notice of the paſſages in which he repreſenteth experience as uncertain, and that not ſo much as a probable argument can be drawn from it; and yet in his ſixth eſſay, which is concerning *probability*, he ſhews that experience may not only furniſh probable concluſions, but what he calls *proofs*; which he explains to be ſuch arguments from experience, as leave no room for doubt or oppoſition†. And he frequently ſpeaks of experience in very high terms, as a certain guide. Again, in ſeveral paſſages above referred to, he expreſsly declares, that in making experimental concluſions, there is no place for *reaſoning*; that the inference in this caſe is entirely owing to cuſtom, and the underſtanding has no part in it: and yet he elſewhere owns, that there is great ſcope of *reaſoning* in inferences of this kind from obſervation and ex-

* Hume's Philoſophical Eſſays, p. 120. † Ibid. p. 93.

perience; and that not only men greatly ſurpaſs the inferior animals in this way of reaſoning, but that one man very much excels another*. And he declares, that "all our *reaſonings* are "founded on a ſpecies of analogy; where the cauſes are entirely "ſimilar, the analogy is perfect; and the inference drawn from "it is regarded as certain and concluſive†;" though he had ſaid, that "it is impoſſible that any arguments from experience can "prove ſuch a reſemblance‡." Another inconſiſtency, which may be obſerved in Mr. Hume's reaſoning on this ſubject, is, that though he repreſents the connexion betwixt cauſe and effect to be only a connexion in our thoughts, not in the things themſelves§, yet he aſſerts, that "there is a kind of pre-eſta-"bliſhed harmony between the courſe of nature, and the ſucceſ-"ſion of our ideas; and though the powers and forces, by which "the former is governed, be wholly unknown to us, yet our "thoughts and conceptions have ſtill, we find, gone on in the "ſame train with other works of nature‖:" where he ſeems to ſuppoſe, that there is a real connexion in the nature of things, to which the connexion in our minds correſpondeth. The general ſtrain of his arguing in ſeveral of his eſſays, ſeems to be deſigned to prove, if it proves any thing, that we cannot be ſure that there is any ſuch thing as cauſe or cauſal connexion in the univerſe: yet he ſays, "it is univerſally allowed that nothing "exiſts without a cauſe of its exiſtence; and that chance is a "negative word, and means not any real power which has any "where a being in nature**." Here he falls into the common way of ſpeaking, that every thing which exiſteth muſt have a cauſe of its exiſtence; otherwiſe we muſt acknowledge the operation of chance. And he obſerves, that "there is no ſuch thing "as chance in the world††." Cauſes therefore muſt be acknowledged, though we cannot explain the manner of their cauſality. And he himſelf, in reckoning up the principles of the connexion of our ideas, diſtinctly mentions *reſemblance*, *contiguity*, and *cauſation;* and this laſt he makes to be the moſt common and uſeful of all‡‡: and yet, in the courſe of his reaſoning, he really

* Hume's Philoſophical Eſſays, p. 170, 171.
† Ibid. p. 165.
‡ Ibid. p. 66.
§ Ibid. p. 123. 126.
‖ Ibid. p. 90.
** Ibid. p. 151.
†† Ibid. p. 93.
‡‡ Ibid. p. 32. 84.

leaves

"leaves no place for *cauſation*, diſtinct from *ſimilarity* or *reſemblance*, and *contiguity*. It may be mentioned, as another inſtance of his inconſiſtency, that he frequently makes *power* and *neceſſary connexion* the ſame thing; and argues, that if there be any connexion between cauſe and effect at all, it muſt be a neceſſary one; for that cannot be called a cauſe, that is not neceſſarily connected with the effect*: and yet, in his Eſſay on *liberty* and *neceſſity*, when ſpeaking of the influence of motives upon the mind, he ſaith, that, " as this influence is *uſually* conjoined with " the action, it muſt be eſteemed a cauſe, and be looked upon as " an inſtance of the neceſſity which we would eſtabliſh†:" where he plainly ſuppoſeth, that it is not eſſential to the notion of a cauſe, that it is infallibly and always connected with the effect; but that it is ſufficient, if it be uſually joined with it. And to the ſame purpoſe, he ſaith, that " all cauſes are not conjoined to " their uſual effects, with like conſtancy and uniformity‡." Indeed, his whole Eſſay on Liberty and Neceſſity, though ſeemingly built upon the ſcheme he had advanced in his foregoing Eſſays, with relation to cauſe and effect, is really not reconcileable to it. In all his reaſonings in theſe Eſſays, concerning cauſe and effect, he had argued, that there is no ſuch thing as *neceſſary connexion*, or indeed any connexion at all, betwixt cauſe and effect: and upon this ſcheme, it is idle to talk of a neceſſity either in phyſical or moral cauſes: And yet in his Eſſay on Liberty and Neceſſity, he plainly argues upon the ſuppoſition of a real connexion; though he will only call it a conjunction betwixt cauſe and effect: And he all along ſuppoſeth the influence of cauſes, and the power of motives; and that a neceſſity muſt be acknowledged in moral as well as phyſical cauſes. He would have us to begin the queſtion concerning Liberty and Neceſſity, not " by examining the faculties of the ſoul, but by examining " the operations of body, and of brute unintelligent matter§:" And with regard to this, he obſerves, that " it is univerſally " allowed, that matter, in all its operations, is actuated by a " neceſſary force; and that every effect is ſo preciſely determined " by the nature and energy of its cauſe, that no other effect, in

* Hume's Philoſophical Eſſays, p. 93. 103. 151.
† Ibid. p. 154.
‡ Ibid. p. 138.
§ Ibid. p. 147.

"such particular circumſtances, could poſſibly have reſulted "from the operation of its cauſe*:" and he expreſsly aſſerteth, that "the conjunction betwixt motives and voluntary actions, is "as regular and uniform as that betwixt the cauſe and effect, in "any part of nature†." Thus we ſee, that he can acknowledge cauſe and effect, and the connexion betwixt them, when he has a mind to take advantage of this, for overthrowing the liberty of human actions. And he concludes the Eſſay, with taking notice of the objection which might be raiſed againſt what he had advanced, *viz.* that "if voluntary actions be ſubjected to the ſame "laws of neceſſity with the operations of matter, there is a con-"tinued chain of neceſſary cauſes, pre-ordained and pre-deter-"mined, reaching from the original cauſe of all, to every ſingle "volition of every human creature. While we act, we are at "the ſame time acted upon. There is no contingency any-"where in the univerſe, no indifferency, no liberty." This objection he putteth very ſtrongly‡; and yet I cannot ſee, that, according to the hypotheſis he had advanced in the foregoing Eſſays, there can be any juſt foundation for it: for if there be only a mere conjunction of events, but no cauſal influence, it cannot be ſaid, that, whilſt we act, we are acted upon. On the contrary, nothing is acted upon, nor is there any power, force, or energy in nature. All events are looſe, ſeparate, and unconnected, and only follow one another, without connexion; and therefore there can be no continued chain of neceſſary cauſes at all. This would be the proper anſwer, according to the principles he had laid down, if he had thought thoſe principles would bear. But he hath not thought fit to make uſe of it; but, in contradiction to his own ſcheme, ſeems here to admit a chain of neceſſary cauſes, phyſical and moral, in order to load providence; and plainly repreſents the objection as unanſwerable§.

Thus I have conſidered, pretty largely, our author's extraordinary ſcheme; and the obſervations that have been made may help us to judge of this gentleman's character as a writer, whether it deſerveth all the admiration and applauſe, which he himſelf, as well as others, have been willing to beſtow upon it. We

* Hume's Philoſophical Eſſays, p. 131, 132.
† Ibid. p. 141.
‡ Ibid. p. 157, 158.
§ Ibid. p. 162.

may

may ſee, by what hath been obſerved, how far he hath anſwered what he had prepared the reader to expect, *clearneſs* and *preciſion*, in his way of treating theſe *curious and ſublime ſubjects*. He had particularly propoſed, with regard to power, force, and energy, "to fix, if poſſible, the preciſe meaning of theſe terms; "and thereby remove part of that obſcurity, which is ſo much "complained of in this ſpecies of philoſophy*."

What Mr. Hume hath offered, concerning cauſe and effect, puts me in mind of a remarkable paſſage in Lord Bolingbroke's poſthumous works, which I ſhall mention on this occaſion. "Whatever knowledge," ſaith his Lordſhip, "we acquire of ap- "parent cauſes, we can acquire none of real cauſality, or that "power, that virtue, whatever it be, by which one being acts on "another, and becomes a cauſe. We may call this by different "names, according to the different effects of it; but to know it "in its firſt principles, to know the nature of it, would be to "know as God himſelf knows; and therefore this will be always "unknown to us, in cauſes that ſeem to be moſt under our in- "ſpection, as well as in others that are the moſt remote from it." And he repreſents thoſe "philoſophers as ridiculous, who, when "they have diſcovered a real actual cauſe, in its effects, by the "phænomena, reject it, becauſe they cannot conceive its cauſa- "lity, nor aſſign a ſufficient reaſon why and how it is †." This may ſeem to bear hard upon Mr. Hume: but what is more to be wondered at, he hath in effect paſſed a cenſure upon himſelf. He indeed gives a high encomium on ſceptical philoſophy, in the beginning of his ſixth Eſſay: that "every paſſion is morti- "fied by it, but the love of truth; and that paſſion never is, nor "can be carried to too high a degree. It is ſurpriſing therefore, "that this philoſophy, which, in almoſt every inſtance, muſt be "harmleſs and innocent, ſhould be the ſubject of ſo much "groundleſs reproach and obloquy ‡." But afterwards, in his twelfth Eſſay, which is of the academical or ſceptical philoſophy, he gives no advantageous notion of ſcepticiſm. He ſays, that "the grand ſcope of all the inquiries and diſputes of the ſceptics is, to deſtroy reaſon by ratiocination and argument §."

* Hume's Philoſophical Eſſays, p. 101, 102.
† Lord Bolingbroke's Works, vol. iii. p. 541.
‡ Hume's Philoſophical Eſſays, p. 70. § Ibid. p. 245.

And,

And, ſpeaking of the ſceptical objections againſt the relation of cauſe and effect, he ſaith, that "while the ſceptic inſiſts upon "theſe topics, he ſeems, for the time at leaſt, to deſtroy all aſ-"ſurance and conviction:" and then he adds, that "theſe argu-"ments might be diſplayed at a greater length, if any durable "good or benefit to ſociety could ever be expected to reſult from "them. For," ſaith he, "here is the chief, and moſt confound-"ing objection to exceſſive ſcepticiſm, that no durable good can "ever be expected from it, while it remains in its full force and "vigour *." And he had ſaid, that "nature will always maintain "her rights, and prevail in the end, over any abſtract reaſon-"ing whatſoever †:" and if ſo, I think we may juſtly conclude, that any abſtract reaſoning which is contrary to the plain voice of nature ought to be rejected, as falſe and trifling, and of no real uſe or ſervice to mankind.

But it were well, if the worſt thing that could be ſaid of our author's exceſſive ſcepticiſm were, that it is trifling and uſeleſs. It will ſoon appear, that, as he hath managed it, it is of a pernicious tendency: but you will probably be of opinion, that enough hath been ſaid of this gentleman, and his oddities, for the preſent. I am, &c.

* Hume's Philoſophical Eſſays, p. 251. † Ibid. p. 71.

LET-

LETTER XVII.

Obſervations on Mr. Hume's Eſſay concerning a particular Providence and a future State—His Attempt to ſhew, that we cannot juſtly argue from the Courſe of Nature to a particular intelligent Cauſe, becauſe the Subject lies entirely beyond the Reach of human Experience, and becauſe God is a ſingular Cauſe, and the Univerſe a ſingular Effect: and therefore we cannot argue by a Compariſon with any other Cauſe, or any other Effect—His Argument examined, whereby he pretends to prove, that, ſince we know God only by the Effects in the Works of Nature, we can judge of his Proceedings no farther than we can now ſee of them, and therefore cannot infer any Rewards or Puniſhments beyond what are already known by Experience or Obſervation—The Uſefulneſs of believing future Retributions acknowledged by Mr. Hume, and that the contrary Doctrine is inconſiſtent with good Policy.

SIR,

IT appears from what was obſerved in my former letter, that few writers have carried ſcepticiſm in philoſophy to a greater height than Mr. Hume. I now proceed to conſider thoſe things in his writings that ſeem to be more directly and immediately deſigned againſt religion. Some part of what he calls his *Philoſophical Eſſays concerning Human Underſtanding*, manifeſtly tends to ſubvert the very foundations of natural religion, or its moſt important principles. Another part of them is particularly levelled againſt the proofs and evidences of the Chriſtian revelation.

The former is what I ſhall firſt conſider, and ſhall therefore examine the eleventh of thoſe eſſays, the title of which is, *concerning a particular providence and a future ſtate.* Mr. Hume introduces what he offers in this eſſay as ſceptical paradoxes advanced by a friend, and pretends by no means to approve of them. He propoſes ſome objections as from himſelf, to his friend's way of arguing, but takes care to do it in ſuch a manner, as to give his friend a ſuperiority in the argument: and ſome of the worſt parts of his eſſay are directly propoſed in his own perſon. The

eſſay

eſſay may be conſidered as conſiſting of two parts. The one ſeems to be deſigned againſt the exiſtence of God, or of one ſupreme intelligent cauſe of the univerſe: the other, which appears to be the main intention of the eſſay, is particularly levelled againſt the doctrine of a future ſtate of rewards and puniſhments.

I ſhall begin with the former, becauſe it comes firſt in order to be conſidered, though it is not particularly mentioned till towards the concluſion of the eſſay. He obſerves, in the perſon of his Epicurean friend, that "while we argue from the courſe of "nature, and infer a particular intelligent cauſe, which at firſt "beſtowed and ſtill preſerves order in the univerſe, we embrace "a principle which is both uncertain and uſeleſs." The reaſon he gives why it is uncertain is, "becauſe the ſubject lies entirely beyond the reach of human experience*." This is a ſpecimen of the uſe our author would make of the principles he had laid down in the preceding eſſays. He had repreſented experience as the only foundation of our knowledge with reſpect to matter of fact, and the exiſtence of objects: that it is by experience alone that we know the relation of cauſe and effect: and he had alſo aſſerted, that not ſo much as a probable argument can be drawn from experience to lay a foundation for our reaſoning from cauſe to effect, or from effect to cauſe. I ſhall not add any thing here to what was offered in my former letter to ſhew the abſurdity, the confuſion, and inconſiſtency of theſe principles. I ſhall only obſerve, that this very writer, who had repreſented all arguments drawn from experience, with relation to cauſe and effect, as abſolutely uncertain, yet makes it an objection againſt the argument from the courſe of nature to an intelligent cauſe, that *the ſubject lies entirely beyond the reach of human experience.* What the meaning of this is, it is not eaſy to apprehend. It will be readily allowed, that we do not know by experience the whole courſe of nature; yet enough of it falls within the reach even of human obſervation and experience, to lay a reaſonable foundation for inferring from it a ſupreme intelligent cauſe. In that part of the univerſe which cometh under our notice and obſervation, we may behold ſuch illuſtrious characters of wiſdom, power, and goodneſs, as determine us, by the

* Hume's Philoſophical Eſſays, p. 224.

moſt

moſt natural way of reaſoning in the world, to acknowledge a moſt wiſe, and powerful, and benign Author and Cauſe of the univerſe. The inference is not beyond the reach of our faculties, but is one of the moſt obvious that offereth to the human mind. But perhaps what the author intends by obſerving, that *this ſubject lies entirely beyond the reach of human experience*, is this: That notwithſtanding the admirable marks of wiſdom and deſign which we behold in the courſe of nature and order of things, we cannot argue from thence to prove a wiſe and intelligent Cauſe of the univerſe, or that there was any wiſdom employed in the formation of it, becauſe neither we, nor any of the human race, were preſent at the making of it, or ſaw how it was made. This muſt be owned to be a very extraordinary way of reaſoning, and I believe you will eaſily excuſe me if I do not attempt a confutation of it.

Mr. Hume, after having argued thus in the perſon of his Epicurean friend, comes in the concluſion of this eſſay to propoſe another argument as from himſelf. "I much doubt," ſaith he, "whether it be poſſible for a cauſe to be known only by its effect, or to be of ſo ſingular and particular a nature as to have "no parallel, and no ſimilarity with any other cauſe or object "that has ever fallen under our obſervation. It is only when "two ſpecies of objects are found to be conſtantly conjoined, "that we can infer the one from the other: and were an effect "preſented which was entirely ſingular, and could not be comprehended under any known ſpecies, I do not ſee that we "could form any conjecture or inference at all concerning its "cauſe. If experience, and obſervation, and analogy, be indeed the only guides we can reaſonably follow in inferences "of this nature, both the effect and cauſe muſt bear a ſimilarity "and reſemblance to other effects and cauſes which we know, "and which we have found in many inſtances to be conjoined "with each other*." Mr. Hume leaves it to his friend's reflections to *proſecute the conſequences of this principle*, which, he had hinted before, might lead *into reaſonings of too nice and delicate a nature* to be inſiſted on. The argument, as he hath managed it, is indeed ſufficiently obſcure and perplexed; but

* Hume's Philoſophical Eſſays, p. 232, 233.

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the general intention of it ſeems to be this; that all our arguings from cauſe to effect, or from effect to cauſe, proceed upon analogy, or the comparing ſimilar cauſes with ſimilar effects. Where therefore there is ſuppoſed to be a ſingular cauſe, to which there is no parallel (though he much doubts whether there can be a cauſe of ſo ſingular a nature), and a ſingular effect, there can be no arguing from the one to the other; becauſe in that caſe we cannot argue by a compariſon with any other cauſe, or any other effect. Except therefore we can find another world to compare this with, and an intelligent cauſe of that world, we cannot argue from the effects in this preſent world to an intelligent cauſe: *i. e.* we cannot be ſure there is one God, except we can prove there is one other God at leaſt; or that this world was formed and produced by a wiſe intelligent cauſe, unleſs we know of another world like this, which was alſo formed by a wiſe intelligent cauſe, and perhaps not then neither: for he ſeems to inſiſt upon it, that there ſhould be *many inſtances* of ſuch cauſes and effects being *conjoined with each other*, in order to lay a proper foundation for *obſervation, experience, and analogy, the only guides we can reaſonably follow in inferences of this nature.* He immediately after obſerves, that "according to the "antagoniſts of Epicurus, the univerſe, an effect quite ſingular "and unparalleled, is always ſuppoſed to be the proof of a deity, "a cauſe no leſs ſingular and unparalleled." If by calling the univerſe a ſingular and unparalleled effect, he intends to ſignify that no other univerſe has come under our obſervation, it is very true: but it by no means follows, that we cannot argue from the evident marks of wiſdom and deſign which we may obſerve in this univerſe that we do know, becauſe we do not know any thing of any other univerſe. This grand univerſal ſyſtem, and even that ſmall part of it that we are more particularly acquainted with, comprehendeth ſuch an amazing variety of phænomena, all which exhibit the moſt inconteſtable proofs of admirable wiſdom, power, and diffuſive goodneſs, that one would think it ſcarce poſſible for a reaſonable mind to reſiſt the evidence. But ſuch is this ſubtile metaphyſical gentleman's way of arguing in a matter of the higheſt conſequence, the abſurdity of which is obvious to any man of plain underſtanding. It is of a piece with what he had advanced before, that there is no ſuch thing as cauſe or effect

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"at all, nor can any probable inference be drawn from the one to the other; than which, as hath been already ſhewn, nothing can be more inconſiſtent with common ſenſe, and the reaſon of all mankind.

The other thing obſervable in this eſſay, and which ſeems to be the principal intention of it, relateth to the proof of a providence and a future ſtate. He introduces his friend as putting himſelf in the place of Epicurus, and making an harangue to the people of Athens, to prove that the principles of his philoſophy were as innocent and ſalutary as thoſe of any other philoſophers. The courſe of his reaſoning or declamation is this: that "the "chief or ſole argument brought by philoſophers for a Divine "Exiſtence is derived from the order of nature; where there ap-"pear ſuch marks of intelligence and deſign, that they think it "extravagant to aſſign for its cauſe, either chance, or the blind "unguided force of matter: That this is an argument drawn from "effects to cauſes: and that when we infer any particular cauſe "from an effect, we muſt proportion the one to the other, and "can never be allowed to aſcribe to the cauſe any qualities, but "what are exactly ſufficient to produce the effect: and if we "aſcribe to it farther qualities, or affirm it capable of producing "any other effect, we only indulge the licence of conjecture "without reaſon or authority*:" That therefore "allowing God "to be the author of the exiſtence or order of the univerſe, it "follows, that he poſſeſſes that preciſe degree of power, intelli-"gence, and benevolence, which appears in his workmanſhip, "but nothing farther can ever be proved†. Thoſe therefore are "vain reaſoners, and reverſe the order of nature, who, inſtead of "regarding this preſent life, and the preſent ſcene of things, as "the ſole object of their contemplation, render it a paſſage to "ſomething farther. The Divinity may indeed poſſibly poſſeſs "attributes which we have never ſeen exerted, and may be go-"verned by principles of action, which we cannot diſcover to be "ſatisfied: but we can never have reaſon to infer any attributes, "or any principles of action in him, but ſo far as we know them "to be exerted or ſatisfied." He aſks, "Are there any marks of "diſtributive juſtice in the world?" And if it be ſaid, that "the

* Hume's Philoſophical Eſſays, p. 215. † Ibid. p. 220.

"juſtice

"juſtice of God exerts itſelf in part, but not in its full extent," he anſwers, "that we have no reaſon to give it any particular "extent, but only ſo far as we ſee it at preſent exert itſelf*:" That "indeed when we find that any work has proceeded from "the ſkill and induſtry of man, who is a being whom we know "by experience, and whoſe nature we are acquainted with, we "can draw a hundred inferences concerning what may be ex-"pected from him, and theſe inferences will all be founded on "experience and obſervation. But ſince the Deity is known to "us only by his productions, and as a ſingle being in the uni-"verſe, not comprehended under any ſpecies or genus, from "whoſe experienced attributes or qualities we can by analogy "infer any attribute or quality in him, we can only infer ſuch "attributes or perfections, and ſuch a degree of thoſe attributes, "as is preciſely adapted to the effect we examine: but farther "attributes or farther degrees of thoſe attributes, we can never "be authorized to infer or ſuppoſe by any rules of juſt reaſon-"ing." He adds, that "the great ſource of our miſtakes on "this ſubject is this: we tacitly conſider ourſelves as in the place "of the Supreme Being, and conclude, that he will on every "occaſion obſerve the ſame conduct, which we ourſelves in his "ſituation would have embraced as reaſonable and eligible: "whereas it muſt evidently appear contrary to all rules of ana-"logy to reaſon from the intentions and projects of men to thoſe "of a Being ſo different, and ſo much ſuperior—ſo remote and "incomprehenſible, who bears leſs analogy to any other being "in the univerſe, than the ſun to a waxen taper." He concludes therefore, "that no new fact can ever be inferred from "the religious hypotheſis: no reward or puniſhment expected or "dreaded beyond what is already known by practice and obſer-"vation†." This is a faithful extract of the argument in this eſſay, drawn together as cloſely as I could, without the repetitions with which it aboundeth.

I ſhall now make a few remarks upon it.

The whole of his reaſoning depends upon this maxim, that when once we have traced an effect up to its cauſe, we can never aſcribe any thing to the cauſe but what is preciſely proportioned

* Hume's Philoſophical Eſſays, p. 203. † Ibid. p. 230, 231.

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to the effect, and what we ourſelves diſcern to be ſo: nor can we infer any thing farther concerning the cauſe, than what the effect, or the preſent appearance of it, neceſſarily leads to. He had to the ſame purpoſe obſerved in a former eſſay, that "it is "allowed by all philoſophers, that the effect is the meaſure of the "power*." But this is far from being univerſally true: for we in many inſtances clearly perceive, that a cauſe can produce an effect which it doth not actually produce, or a greater effect than it hath actually produced. This gentleman's whole reaſoning proceeds upon confounding neceſſary and free cauſes; and indeed he ſeems not willing to allow any diſtinction between them, or that there are any other but neceſſary and material cauſes†. A neceſſary cauſe acts up to the utmoſt of its power, and therefore the effect muſt be exactly proportioned to it. But the caſe is manifeſtly different as to free and voluntary cauſes. They may have a power of producing effects, which they do not actually produce: and as they act from diſcernment and choice, we may, in many caſes, reaſonably aſcribe to them farther views than what we diſcern or diſcover in their preſent courſe of action. This author himſelf owns, that this may be reaſonably done with reſpect to man, whom we know by experience, and whoſe nature and conduct we are acquainted with; but denies that the ſame way of arguing will hold with reſpect to the Deity. But ſurely, when once we come from the conſideration of his works to the knowledge of a ſelf-exiſtent and abſolutely perfect Being, we may, from the nature of that ſelf-exiſtent and abſolutely perfect cauſe, reaſonably conclude, that he is able to produce certain effects beyond what actually come under our preſent notice and obſervation, and indeed that he can do whatſoever doth not imply a contradiction. This univerſe is a vaſt, a glorious, and amazing ſyſtem, comprehending an infinite variety of parts: and it is but a ſmall part of it that comes under our own more immediate notice. But we know enough to be convinced, that it demonſtrateth a wiſdom as well as power beyond all imagination great and wonderful: and we may juſtly conclude the ſame concerning thoſe parts of the univerſe that we are not acquainted with. And for any man to ſay, that we cannot reaſonably aſcribe

* Hume's Philoſophical Eſſays, p. 125. † Ibid. p. 131, 134. 141. 151.

any degree of wiſdom or power to God, but what is exactly proportioned to that part of the univerſal frame which comes under our own particular obſervation, is a very ſtrange way of arguing! The proofs of the wiſdom and power of God, as appearing in our part of the ſyſtem, are ſo ſtriking, that it is hard to conceive how any man that is not under the influence of the moſt obſtinate prejudice, can refuſe to ſubmit to their force: and yet there are many phænomena, the reaſons and ends of which we are not at preſent able to aſſign. The proper conduct in ſuch a caſe is, to believe there are moſt wiſe reaſons for theſe things, though we do not now diſcern thoſe reaſons, and to argue from the unconteſted characters of wiſdom in things that we do know, that this moſt wiſe and powerful agent, the author of nature, hath alſo acted with admirable wiſdom in thoſe things, the deſigns and ends of which we do not know. It would be wrong therefore to confine the meaſures of his wiſdom preciſely to what appeareth to our narrow apprehenſions, in that part of his works which falleth under our immediate inſpection. This was the great fault of the Epicureans, and other atheiſtical philoſophers, who, judging by their own narrow views, urged ſeveral things as proofs of the want of wiſdom and contrivance, which, upon a fuller knowledge of the works of nature, furniſh farther convincing proofs of the wiſdom of the great Former of all things.

In like manner, with reſpect to his goodneſs, there are numberleſs things in this preſent conſtitution, which lead us to regard him as a moſt benign and benevolent Being. And therefore it is highly reaſonable, that when we meet with any phænomena, which we cannot reconcile with our ideas of the divine goodneſs, we ſhould conclude, that it is only for want of having the whole of things before us, and conſidering them in their connexion and harmony, that they appear to us with a diſorderly aſpect. And it is very juſt in ſuch a caſe to make uſe of any reaſonable hypotheſis, which tendeth to ſet the goodneſs of God in a fair and conſiſtent light.

The ſame way of reaſoning holds with regard to the juſtice and righteouſneſs of God as the great Governor of the world. We may reaſonably conclude, from the intimate ſenſe we have of the excellency of ſuch a character, and the great evil and deformity

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of injuſtice and unrighteouſneſs, which ſenſe is implanted in us by the author of our being, and from the natural rewards of virtue, and puniſhment of vice, even in the preſent conſtitution of things, that he is a lover of righteouſneſs and virtue, and an enemy to vice and wickedneſs. Our author himſelf makes his Epicurean friend acknowledge, that in the preſent order of things, virtue is attended with more peace of mind, and with many other advantages above vice*: and yet it cannot be denied, that there are many inſtances obvious to common obſervation, in which vice ſeemeth to flouriſh and proſper, and virtue to be expoſed to great evils and calamities. What is to be concluded from this? Is it that, becauſe the juſtice of God here ſheweth itſelf only *in part*, and not *in its full extent* (to uſe our author's expreſſion), therefore righteouſneſs in God is imperfect in its degree, and that he doth not poſſeſs it in the full extent of that perfection, nor will ever exert it any farther than we ſee him exert it in this preſent ſtate? This were an unreaſonable concluſion, concerning a being of ſuch admirable perfection, whoſe righteouſneſs as well as wiſdom muſt be ſuppoſed to be infinitely ſuperior to ours. It is natural therefore to think, that this preſent life is only a part of the divine ſcheme, which ſhall be completed in a future ſtate.

But he urgeth, that the great ſource of our miſtakes on this ſubject is, that "we tacitly conſider ourſelves as in the place of "the Supreme Being, and conclude that he will on every oc- "caſion obſerve the ſame conduct, which we ourſelves in his "ſituation would have embraced as reaſonable and eligible. "Whereas it muſt evidently appear contrary to all rules of ana- "logy, to reaſon from the intentions and purpoſes of men to thoſe "of a Being ſo different and ſo much ſuperior, ſo remote and "incomprehenſible†." But though it were the higheſt abſurdity to pretend to tie down the infinite incomprehenſible Being to our ſcanty model and meaſures of acting, and to aſſume that he will *on every occaſion* (for ſo our author is pleaſed to put the caſe) obſerve the ſame conduct that we ſhould judge eligible; ſince there may be innumerable things concerning which we are unable to form any proper judgment, for want of having the ſame comprehenſive view of things that he hath; yet on the other hand,

* Hume's Philoſophical Eſſays, p. 221. † Ibid. p. 230.

there are ſome caſes ſo manifeſt, that we may ſafely pronounce concerning them, as worthy or unworthy of the divine perfections. And as our own natures are the work of God, we may reaſonably argue from the traces of excellencies in ourſelves to the infinitely ſuperior perfections in the great Author of the univerſe, ſtill taking care to remove all thoſe limitations and defects with which thoſe qualities are attended in us. This is what Mr. Hume himſelf elſewhere allows in his *Eſſay on the Origin of our Ideas*. "The idea of God," ſaith he, "as meaning an infinitely "intelligent, wiſe, and good Being, ariſes from reflecting on the "operations of our own minds, and augmenting thoſe qualities "of goodneſs and wiſdom without bound or limit." See his *Philoſophical Eſſays*, p. 24, 25. Since therefore we cannot poſſibly help regarding goodneſs and benevolence, juſtice and righteouſneſs, as neceſſary ingredients in a worthy and excellent character, and as among the nobleſt excellencies of an intellectual being, we are unavoidably led to conclude, that they are to be found in the higheſt poſſible degree of eminency in the abſolutely perfect Being, the Author and Governor of the world. Theſe are not mere arbitrary ſuppoſitions, but are evidently founded in nature and reaſon: and though in many particular inſtances we, through the narrowneſs of our views, cannot be proper judges of the grounds and reaſons of the divine adminiſtration, yet in general we have reaſon to conclude, that if there be ſuch a thing as goodneſs and righteouſneſs in God, or any perfection in him correſpondent to what is called goodneſs and righteouſneſs in us, he will order it ſo, that in the final iſſue of things, a remarkable difference ſhall be made between the righteous and the wicked: that, at one time or other, and taking in the whole of exiſtence, virtue, though now for a time it may be greatly afflicted and oppreſſed, ſhall meet with its due reward; and vice and wickedneſs, though now it may ſeem to proſper and triumph, ſhall receive its proper puniſhment. Since therefore, by the obſervation of all ages, it hath often happened, that in the preſent courſe of human affairs, good and excellent perſons have been unhappy, and expoſed to many evils and ſufferings, and bad and vicious men have been in very proſperous circumſtances, and have had a large affluence of all worldly enjoyments, even to the ends of their lives, and that, as this gentleman himſelf elſewhere expreſſeth it,

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" ſuch is the confuſion and diſorder of human affairs, that no " perfect œconomy or regular diſtribution of happineſs or miſery " is in this life ever to be expected*;" it ſeems reaſonable to conclude, that there ſhall be a future ſtate of exiſtence, in which theſe apparent irregularities ſhall be ſet right, and there ſhall be a more perfect diſtribution of rewards and puniſhments to men according to their moral conduct. There is nothing in this way of arguing but what is conformable to the ſoundeſt principles of reaſon, and to the natural feelings of the human heart. But though a future ſtate of retributions in general be probable, yet as many doubts might ſtill be apt to ariſe in our minds concerning it, an expreſs revelation from God, aſſuring us of it in his name, and more diſtinctly pointing out the nature and certainty of thoſe retributions, would be of the moſt ſignal advantage.

I ſhall have occaſion to reſume this ſubject, when I come to conſider what Lord Bolingbroke hath more largely offered in relation to it. At preſent it is proper to obſerve, that though Mr. Hume ſeems to allow his Epicurean friend's reaſoning to be juſt, yet he owns, that " in fact men do not reaſon after that " manner;" and that " they draw many conſequences from the " belief of a divine exiſtence, and ſuppoſe that the Deity will in- " flict puniſhments on vice, and beſtow rewards on virtue, be- " yond what appears in the ordinary courſe of nature. Whe- " ther this reaſoning of theirs," adds he, " be juſt or not, is no " matter: its influence on their life and conduct muſt ſtill be the " ſame. And thoſe who attempt to diſabuſe them of ſuch pre- " judices, may, for aught I know, be good reaſoners, but I can- " not allow them to be good citizens and politicians: ſince they " free men from one reſtraint upon their paſſions; and make the " infringement of the laws of equity and ſociety in one reſpect " more eaſy and ſecure†." I think it follows from this by his own account, that he did not act a wiſe or good part, the part of a friend to the public or to mankind, in publiſhing this Eſſay, the manifeſt deſign of which is to perſuade men, that there is no juſt foundation in reaſon for expecting a future ſtate of rewards and puniſhments at all. Nor is the conceſſion he here

* Hume's Moral and Political Eſſays, p. 244, 245.

† —— Philoſophical Eſſays, p. 231.

makes very favourable to what he addeth in the next page, concerning the univerſal liberty to be allowed by the ſtate to all kinds of philoſophy. According to his own way of repreſenting it, Epicurus muſt have been caſt, if he had pleaded his cauſe before the people; and the principal deſign of this Eſſay, which ſeems to be to ſhew not only the reaſonableneſs, but harmleſsneſs, of that philoſophy, is loſt: for if the ſpreading of thoſe principles and reaſonings is contrary to the rules of good policy, and the character of good citizens; if they have a tendency to free men from a ſtrong *reſtraint upon their paſſions*, and to make the *infringement of the laws of equity and ſociety more eaſy and ſecure*; then ſuch principles and reaſonings, according to his way of repreſenting the matter, ought in good policy to be reſtrained, as having a bad influence on the community.

There is one paſſage more in this Eſſay which may deſerve ſome notice. It is in page 230, where he obſerves, that "God diſcovers himſelf by ſome faint traces or outlines, beyond which "we have no authority to aſcribe to him any attribute or perfection. What we imagine to be a ſuperior perfection may "really be a defect. Or, were it ever ſo much a perfection, the "aſcribing it to the Supreme Being, where it appears not to "have been really exerted to the full in his works, favours more "of flattery and panegyric, than of juſt reaſoning and ſound philoſophy." The courſe of his arguing ſeems to be this: That it would favour of *flattery*, not of *ſound reaſoning*, to aſcribe any attribute or perfection to God, which *appears not to have been exerted to the full in his works*. And he had obſerved before, that "it is impoſſible for us to know any thing of the cauſe, "but what we have antecedently, not inferred, but *diſcovered to* "*the full* in the effect*." It is plain therefore, that according to him we ought not to aſcribe any perfection to God, but what is not merely *inferred*, but *diſcovered to the full* in his works. It is alſo manifeſt, that according to him there is no attribute or perfection of the Deity exerted or diſcovered to the full in his works; for he had ſaid juſt before, that he *diſcovers himſelf only by ſome faint traces or outlines*. The natural concluſion from theſe premiſes taken together is plainly this: that it would be

* Hume's Philoſophical Eſſays, p. 222.

flattery

flattery and preſumption in us to aſcribe any attribute or perfection to God at all. And now I leave it to you to judge of the obligations the world is under to this writer. In one part of this Eſſay, he makes an attempt to ſubvert the proof of the exiſtence of God, or a ſupreme intelligent cauſe of the univerſe: and here he inſinuates, that it would be wrong to aſcribe any perfection or attribute to him at all. And the main deſign of the whole Eſſay is to ſhew, that no argument can be drawn from any of his perfections, to make it probable, that there ſhall be rewards and puniſhments in a future ſtate, though he acknowledgeth that it is of great advantage to mankind to believe them.

You will not wonder after this, that this gentleman, who has endeavoured to ſhake the foundations of natural religion, ſhould uſe his utmoſt efforts to ſubvert the evidences of the Chriſtian revelation. What he hath offered this way will be the ſubject of ſome future letters.

LETTER XVIII.

An Examination of Mr. Hume's Eſſay on Miracles—*A Summary of the firſt Part of that Eſſay; which is deſigned to ſhew, that Miracles are incapable of being proved by any Teſtimony or Evidence whatſoever—His main Principle examined, that Experience is our only Guide in reaſoning concerning Matters of Fact; and that Miracles being contrary to the eſtabliſhed Laws of Nature, there is an uniform Experience againſt the Exiſtence of any Miracle—It is ſhewn, that no Argument can be drawn from Experience, to prove that Miracles are impoſſible, or that they have not been actually wrought—Miracles not above the Power of God, nor unworthy of his Wiſdom—Valuable Ends may be aſſigned for Miracles—They are capable of being proved by proper Teſtimony—This applied to the Reſurrection of Chriſt—And it is ſhewn, that the Evidence ſet before us in Scripture is every way ſufficient to ſatisfy us of the Truth of it, ſuppoſing that Evidence to have been really given as there repreſented.*

SIR,

I NOW proceed to conſider Mr. Hume's celebrated *Eſſay on Miracles*, which is the tenth of his *Philoſophical Eſſays*, and has been mightily admired and extolled, as a maſterly and unanſwerable piece. I think no impartial man will ſay ſo, that has read the ingenious and judicious anſwer made to it by the Reverend Mr. Adams, now Rector of Shrewſbury. It is intitled, *An Eſſay in Anſwer to Mr. Hume's Eſſay on Miracles, by William Adams, M. A.* That which I have by me is the ſecond edition, with additions, London, 1754. Beſides this, I have ſeen a ſhort but excellent diſcourſe, by the Reverend Dr. Rutherforth, intitled, *The Credibility of Miracles defended againſt the Author of the Philoſophical Eſſays*—"In a diſcourſe delivered at "the primary viſitation of the Right Reverend Thomas Lord "Biſhop of Ely.—Cambridge, 1751." Theſe in my opinion are ſufficient. But ſince you deſire that I would alſo take a particular

ticular notice of Mr. Hume's Eſſay, I ſhall obey your commands, and enter on a diſtinct conſideration of this boaſted performance.

Mr. Hume introduceth his *Eſſay on Miracles* in a very pompous manner, as might be expected from one who ſets up in his Philoſophical Eſſays, for teaching men better methods of reaſoning than any philoſopher had done before him. He had taken care at every turn to let his leaders know how much they are obliged to him for throwing new light on the moſt *curious* and *ſublime effects*, with regard to which the moſt celebrated philoſophers had been *extremely defective* in their reſearches. And now he begins his *Eſſay on Miracles* with declaring, that "he "flatters himſelf that he has diſcovered an argument, which, if "juſt, will, with the wiſe and learned, be an everlaſting check "to all kinds of ſuperſtitious deluſion; and conſequently, will "be uſeful as long as the world endures: for ſo long," he preſumes, "will the account of miracles and prodigies be found in "all profane hiſtory*."

This Eſſay conſiſteth of two parts. The firſt, which reacheth from p. 173 to p. 186, is deſigned to ſhew, that no evidence which can be given, however ſeemingly full and ſtrong, can be a ſufficient ground for believing the truth and exiſtence of miracles: or, in other words, that miracles are in the nature of things incapable of being proved by any evidence or teſtimony whatſoever. The ſecond part is intended to ſhew, that ſuppoſing a miracle capable of being proved by full and ſufficient evidence or teſtimony, yet in fact there never was a *miraculous event in any hiſtory* eſtabliſhed upon ſuch evidence. The firſt is what he ſeems principally to rely upon: and indeed, if this can be proved, it will make any particular inquiry into the teſtimony produced for miracles, needleſs.

The method he makes uſe of in the firſt part of his Eſſay, to ſhew, that no evidence or teſtimony that can be given is a ſufficient ground for a reaſonable aſſent to the truth and exiſtence of miracles, is this: He lays it down as an undoubted principle, that experience is our only guide in reaſoning concerning matters of fact, and at the ſame time inſinuates, that this guide is far

* Hume's Philoſophical Eſſays, p. 174.

from

from being infallible, and is apt to lead us into errors and miſtakes. He obſerves, that the validity and credibility of human teſtimony is wholly founded upon experience: That in judging how far a teſtimony is to be depended upon, we balance the oppoſite circumſtances, which may create any doubt or uncertainty: That the evidence ariſing from teſtimony may be deſtroyed, either by the contrariety and oppoſition of the teſtimony, or by the conſideration of the nature of the facts themſelves: That when the facts partake of the *marvellous* and *extraordinary*, there are two oppoſite experiences with regard to them; and that which is the moſt credible is to be preferred, though ſtill with a diminution of its credibility in proportion to the force of the other which is oppoſed to it: That this holdeth ſtill more ſtrongly in the caſe of miracles, which are ſuppoſed to be contrary to the laws of nature; for experience being our only guide, and an uniform experience having eſtabliſhed thoſe laws, there muſt be an uniform experience againſt the exiſtence of any miracle: and an uniform experience amounts to a full and entire proof. To ſuppoſe therefore any teſtimony to be a proof of a miracle, is to ſuppoſe one full proof for a miracle, oppoſed to another full proof in the nature of the thing againſt it, in which caſe thoſe proofs deſtroy one another. Finally, that we are not to believe any teſtimony concerning a miracle, except the falſehood of that teſtimony ſhould be more miraculous than the miracle itſelf which it is deſigned to eſtabliſh. He alſo gives a hint, that as it is impoſſible for us to know the attributes or actions of God otherwiſe than from the experience which we have of his productions, we cannot be ſure that he can effect miracles, which are contrary to all our experience, and the eſtabliſhed courſe of nature: and therefore miracles are impoſſible to be proved by any evidence.

Having given this general idea of this firſt part of Mr. Hume's Eſſay on Miracles, I ſhall now proceed to a more particular examination of it.

It is manifeſt that the main principle, which lieth at the foundation of his whole ſcheme, is this: that experience is our only "guide in reaſoning concerning matters of fact*." You will

* Hume's Philoſophical Eſſays, p. 174.

have

have obſerved, from what hath been remarked in my former letters, that this author brings up the word *experience* upon all occaſions. It is, as he hath managed it, a kind of cant term, propoſed in a looſe indeterminate way, ſo that it is not eaſy to form a clear idea of it, or of what this writer preciſely intends by it. He had declared, that it is only by experience that we come to know the exiſtence of objects: that it is only by experience that we know the relation between cauſe and effect: and at the ſame time had endeavoured to ſhew, that experience cannot furniſh ſo much as even a probable argument concerning any connexion betwixt cauſe and effect, or by which we can draw any concluſion from the one to the other. He had afterwards applied the ſame term, experience, to ſhew that no argument can be brought to prove the exiſtence of one ſupreme intelligent cauſe of the univerſe, becauſe this is *a ſubject that lies entirely beyond the reach of human experience;* and that we can have no proof of a future ſtate of retributions, becauſe we know no more concerning providence than what we learn from experience in this preſent ſtate. And now he comes to try the force of this formidable word againſt the exiſtence of miracles, and to raiſe an argument againſt them from experience.

But that we may not loſe ourſelves in the ambiguity of the term as he employs it, let us diſtinctly examine what ſenſe it bears as applied to the preſent queſtion. In judging of the truth of the maxim he hath laid down, *viz.* that experience is our only guide in reaſoning concerning matters of fact, it is to be conſidered, that the queſtion we are now upon properly relates not to future *events*, as the author ſeems ſometimes to put it*, but to paſt matter of fact. What are we therefore to underſtand by that experience, which he makes to be our only guide in reaſoning concerning them? Is it our own particular perſonal experience, or is it the experience of others, as well as our own? And if of others, is it the experience of ſome others only, or of all mankind? If it be underſtood thus, that every man's own perſonal obſervation and experience is to be his only guide in reaſoning concerning matters of fact; ſo that no man is to believe any thing with relation to any facts whatſoever, but what is agreeable to what he hath himſelf obſerved or known in the courſe

* Hume's Philoſophical Eſſays, p. 175.

of

of his own particular experience; this would be very abſurd, and would reduce each man's knowledge of facts into a very narrow compaſs; it would deſtroy the uſe and credit of hiſtory, and of a great part of experimental philoſophy, and bring us into a ſtate of general ignorance and barbariſm. Or, is the word *experience* to be taken in a larger and more extenſive ſenſe, as comprehending not merely any particular man's experience, but that of others too? In this caſe we have no way of knowing experience, but by teſtimony. And here the queſtion recurs; is it to be underſtood of the experience of all mankind, or of ſome perſons only? If the experience referred to be the experience or obſervation of ſome perſons only, or of a part of mankind, how can this be depended on as a certain guide? For why ſhould their experience be the guide, excluſively of that of others? and how do we know, but that many facts may be agreeable to the experience of others, which are not to theirs? But if the experience referred to be the experience of all mankind in general, that muſt take in the experience both of all men of the preſent age, and of thoſe in paſt times and ages, it muſt be acknowledged, that this rule and criterion is not eaſily applicable: for will any man ſay, that we are to believe no facts but what are agreeable to the experience of mankind in all ages? Are we, in order to this, to take in whatſoever any man or men in any age or country have had experience of? and to judge by this how far it is reaſonable to believe any paſt fact or facts of which we ourſelves have not had ſenſible evidence? Even on this view of the caſe, it might probably take in many facts of a very extraordinary nature, and which have happened out of the common courſe of things; of which there have been inſtances in the experience and obſervation of different nations and ages. And at this rate experience will not be inconſiſtent with the belief even of miracles themſelves, of which there have been ſeveral inſtances recorded in the hiſtory of mankind.

But farther, in reaſoning from experience, either our own or that of others, concerning matters of fact, it is to be conſidered, what it is that we propoſe to judge or determine by experience in relation to them. Is it whether theſe facts are poſſible, or whether they are probable, or whether they have been actually done? As to the poſſibility of facts, experience indeed, or the obſervation

obſervation of ſimilar events known to ourſelves or others, may aſſure us that facts or events are poſſible, but not that the contrary is impoſſible. Concerning this, experience cannot decide any thing at all. We cannot conclude any event to be impoſſible, merely becauſe we have had no experience of the like, or becauſe it is contrary to our own obſervation and experience, or to the experience of others: for, as this gentleman obſerves in another part of his Eſſays, "the contrary of every matter of fact "is ſtill poſſible; becauſe it can never imply a contradiction*." And again he ſays, ſpeaking of matters of fact, "there are no "demonſtrative arguments in the caſe, ſince it implies no con- "tradiction, that the courſe of nature may change†." No argument therefore can be brought to demonſtrate any thing or fact to be impoſſible, merely becauſe it is contrary to the courſe of our own obſervation and experience, and that of mankind, provided it doth not imply a contradiction, or provided there be a power capable of effecting it. Another thing to be conſidered, with regard to facts, is, whether they are probable: And here experience, or the obſervation of ſimilar events, made by ourſelves or others, may be of great uſe to aſſiſt us in forming a judgment concerning the probability of paſt facts, or in forming conjectures concerning future ones. But if the queſtion be, Whether an event has actually happened, or a fact has been done; concerning this, experience, taken from an obſervation of ſimilar events, or the ordinary courſe of cauſes and effects, cannot give us any aſſurance or certainty to proceed upon. We cannot certainly conclude, that any fact or event has been done, merely becauſe we or others have had experience or obſervation of a fact or event of a like nature: nor, on the other hand, can we conclude, that ſuch a certain event hath not happened, or that ſuch a fact hath not been actually done, becauſe we have not had experience of a like action or event being done, or have had experience of the contrary being done. The rule, therefore, which he lays down of judging which ſide is ſupported by the greater number of experiments, and of balancing the oppoſite experiments, and deducting the leſſer number from the greater, in order to know the exact force of the ſuperior evidence‡, is

* Hume's Philoſophical Eſſays, p. 48. † Ibid. p. 62. ‡ Ibid. p. 176.

very

very uncertain and fallacious, if employed in judging whether matters of fact have been really done: for the fact referred to, and the evidence attending it, may be ſo circumſtanced, that though it be a fact of a ſingular nature, and to which many inſtances of a different kind may be oppoſed, we may yet have ſuch an aſſurance of its having been actually done, as may reaſonably produce a ſufficient conviction in the mind. The proper way of judging whether a fact or event, of which we ourſelves have not had ſenſible evidence, hath been actually done, is by competent teſtimony. And this in common language is diſtinguiſhed from experience, though this writer artfully confounds them.

This therefore is what we are next to conſider, *viz.* the force of human teſtimony, and how far it is to be depended upon.

And with regard to the validity of the evidence ariſing from human teſtimony, he obſerves, that "there is no ſpecies of reaſoning more common, more uſeful, and even neceſſary to human life, than that derived from the teſtimony of men, and the reports of eye-witneſſes and ſpectators." The whole certainty or aſſurance ariſing from teſtimony he reſolveth into what he calls *paſt experience*. That "it is derived from no other principle than our obſervation of the veracity of human teſtimony, and of the uſual conformity of facts to the report of witneſſes." And he mentions, as grounds of the belief of human teſtimony, that "men have commonly an inclination to truth, and a ſentiment of probity; that they are ſenſible to ſhame when detected in a falſehood; and that theſe are qualities diſcovered by experience to be inherent in human nature*." But he might have put the caſe much more ſtrongly, by obſerving, that human teſtimony, by the acknowledgment of all mankind, may be ſo circumſtanced, as to produce an infallible aſſurance, or an evidence ſo ſtrong, that, as our author expreſſeth it in another caſe, none *but a fool or a madman* would doubt of it. It is a little too looſe to ſay in general, that it is *founded only on paſt experience*. It hath its foundation in the very nature of things, in the conſtitution of the world and of mankind, and in the appointment of the Author of our being, who it is manifeſt hath formed and deſigned us to be in numberleſs inſtances determined by this evidence,

* Hume's Philoſophical Eſſays, p. 176, 177.

which

which often comes with ſuch force, that we cannot refuſe our aſſent to it without the greateſt abſurdity, and putting a manifeſt conſtraint upon our nature*. Mr. Hume himſelf, in his Eſſay on Liberty and Neceſſity, hath run a parallel between moral and phyſical evidence, and hath endeavoured to ſhew that the one is as much to be depended on as the other. He expreſsly ſaith, that "when we conſider how aptly natural and moral evidence "link together, and form only one chain of argument, we ſhall "make no ſcruple to allow, that they are of the ſame nature, and "derived from the ſame principles†."

It will be eaſily granted, what our author here obſerves, that "there are a number of circumſtances to be taken into conſider-"ation in all judgments of this kind: and that we muſt balance "the oppoſite circumſtances that create any doubt or uncertainty; "and when we diſcover a ſuperiority on any ſide, we incline to "it, but ſtill with a diminution of aſſurance in proportion to the "force of its antagoniſt‡." Among the particulars which may diminiſh or deſtroy the force of any argument drawn from human teſtimony, he mentions the contrariety of the evidence, contradictions of witneſſes, their ſuſpicious character, &c.: and then proceeds to take notice of "what may be drawn from the nature "of the fact atteſted, ſuppoſing it to partake of the extraordinary "and the marvellous." He argueth, that "in that caſe the evi-"dence reſulting from the teſtimony receives a diminution greater "or leſs in proportion as the fact is more or leſs unuſual. When "the fact atteſted is ſuch a one as has ſeldom fallen under our "obſervation, here is a conteſt of two oppoſite experiences, of "which the one deſtroys the other as far as its force goes; and "the ſuperior can only operate upon the mind by the force which "remains." This is a plauſible, but a very fallacious way of reaſoning. A thing may be very unuſual, and yet, if confirmed by proper teſtimony, its being unuſual may not diminiſh its credit, or produce in the mind of a thinking perſon a doubt or ſuſpicion concerning it. Indeed vulgar minds, who judge of every thing by their own narrow notions, and by what they themſelves have ſeen, are often apt to reject and diſbelieve a

* See concerning this, Ditton on the Reſurrection, part. 2.

† Hume's Philoſophical Eſſays, p. 144. ‡ Ibid. p. 177.

thing,

thing, that is not conformable to their own particular cuſtoms or experience. But wiſer men and thoſe of more enlarged minds judge otherwiſe; and, provided a thing comes to them ſufficiently atteſted and confirmed by good evidence, make its being unuſual no objection at all to its credibility. Many uncommon facts, and unuſual phænomena of nature, are believed by the moſt ſagacious philoſophers, and received as true without heſitation, upon the teſtimony of perſons who were worthy of credit, without following the author's rules, or making their own want of experience or obſervation an objection againſt thoſe accounts. And upon this dependeth no ſmall part of our knowledge. Mr. Adams hath very well illuſtrated this by ſeveral inſtances, and hath juſtly obſerved, "that the moſt uniform experience is ſometimes outweighed by a ſingle teſtimony; becauſe experience in this caſe is only a negative evidence, and the ſlighteſt poſitive teſtimony is for the moſt part an overbalance to the ſtrongeſt negative evidence that can be produced*."

Our author here very improperly talks of a *conteſt between two oppoſite experiences*, the one of which deſtroys the other. For when I believe a thing unuſual, I do not believe a thing oppoſite to mine own experience, but different from it, or a thing of which I have had no experience; though if it were a thing contrary to my own experience, provided it were confirmed by ſufficient teſtimony, this is not a valid argument againſt its truth, nor a ſufficient reaſon for diſbelieving it. This gentleman himſelf hath mentioned a remarkable inſtance of this kind in the Indian prince, who refuſed to believe the *firſt relations concerning the effects of froſt*. This inſtance, though he laboureth the point here, and in an additional note at the end of his book, is not at all favourable to his ſcheme. He acknowledgeth, that in this caſe of freezing, the event follows *contrary to the rules of analogy, and is* SUCH AS A RATIONAL INDIAN *would not look for*. The conſtant experience in thoſe countries, according to which the waters are always fluid, and never in a ſtate of hardneſs and ſolidity, is againſt freezing. This, according to his way of reaſoning, might be regarded as a *proof* drawn from conſtant experience, and the uniform courſe of nature, as far as they

* Adams's Eſſay in anſwer to Hume on Miracles, p. 19, 20.

knew

" knew it. Here then is an inſtance, in which it is reaſonable for men to believe upon good evidence an event no way conformable to their experience, and contrary to the rule of analogy, which he yet ſeems to make the only rule by which we are to judge of the credibility and truth of facts.

From the conſideration of facts that are unuſual, he proceeds to thoſe that are miraculous, which is what he hath principally in view; and with regard to theſe, he endeavoureth to ſhew, that no teſtimony at all is to be admitted. " Let us ſuppoſe," ſaith he, " that the fact which they affirm, inſtead of being only mar-" vellous, is really miraculous; and ſuppoſe alſo that the teſti-" mony, conſidered apart, and in itſelf, amounts to an entire " proof; in that caſe there is proof againſt proof, of which the " ſtrongeſt muſt prevail, but ſtill with a diminution of its force " in proportion to that of its antagoniſt*." It may be proper to remark here, that this writer had in a former Eſſay defined a proof to be *ſuch an argument drawn from experience, as leaves no room for doubt or oppoſition*†. Admitting this definition, it is improper and abſurd for him to talk of *proof againſt proof*: for ſince a proof, according to his own account of it, leaves no room for doubt or oppoſition; where there is a proper proof of a fact, there cannot be a proper proof at the ſame time againſt it: for one truth cannot contradict another truth. No doubt his intention is to ſignify, that there can be no proof given of a miracle at all, and that the proof is only on the other ſide; for he there adds, " A miracle is a violation of the laws of nature; and as a " firm and unalterable experience hath eſtabliſhed thoſe laws" [he ſhould have ſaid, hath diſcovered to us that theſe are the eſtabliſhed laws, *i. e.* that this is the ordinary courſe of nature] " the " proof againſt a miracle, from the very nature of the fact, is as " entire as any argument from experience can poſſibly be ima-" gined." He repeats this again afterward, and obſerves, that " there muſt be an uniform experience againſt every miraculous " event, otherwiſe the event would not merit the appellation; " and as an uniform experience amounts to a proof, there is " here a direct and full proof from the nature of the fact, againſt " the exiſtence of any miracle‡." He ſeems to have a very

* Hume's Philoſophical Eſſays, p. 108. † Ibid. p. 93. ‡ Ibid. p. 181.

high opinion of the force of this way of reaſoning; and therefore takes care to put his reader again in mind of it in the latter part of his Eſſay. "'Tis experience alone," ſaith he, "which gives "authority to human teſtimony; and 'tis the ſame experience "that aſſures us of the laws of nature. When therefore theſe "two kinds of experience are contrary, we have nothing to do, "but to ſubſtract the one from the other.—And this ſubſtrac-"tion with regard to all popular religions amounts to an entire "annihilation*." And it is chiefly upon this that he foundeth the arrogant cenſure, which, with an unparalleled aſſurance, he paſſeth upon all that believe the Chriſtian religion, *viz.* that "whoſoever is moved by faith to aſſent to it, is conſcious of a "continued miracle in his own perſon, which ſubverts all the "principles of his underſtanding, and gives him a determination "to believe whatever is moſt contrary to cuſtom and experi-"ence." It is thus that he concludes his Eſſay, as if he had for ever ſilenced all the advocates for Chriſtianity, and they muſt henceforth either renounce their faith, or ſubmit to paſs with men of his ſuperior underſtanding for perſons miraculouſly ſtupid, and utterly loſt to all reaſon and common ſenſe.

Let us therefore examine what there is in this argument that can ſupport ſuch a peculiar ſtrain of confidence; and I believe it will appear, that never was there weaker reaſoning ſet off with ſo much pomp and parade.

There is one general obſervation that may be ſufficiently obvious to any man, who brings with him common ſenſe and attention, and which is alone ſufficient to ſhew the fallacy of this boaſted argument; and it is this: That the proof ariſing from experience, on which he layeth ſo mighty a ſtreſs, amounteth to no more than this, that we learn from it what is conformable to the ordinary courſe and order of things, but we cannot learn or pronounce from experience that it is impoſſible things or events ſhould happen in any particular inſtance contrary to that courſe. We cannot therefore pronounce ſuch an event, though it be contrary to the uſual courſe of things, to be impoſſible; in which caſe no teſtimony whatſoever could prove it. And if it be poſſible, there is place for teſtimony. And this teſtimony may be

* Hume's Philoſophical Eſſays, p. 202, 203.

ſo

ſo ſtrong and ſo circumſtanced, as to make it reaſonable for us to believe it. And if we have ſufficient evidence to convince us that ſuch an event hath actually happened, however extraordinary or miraculous, no argument drawn from experience can prove that it hath not happened. I would obſerve by the way, that when this gentleman talks of an *uniform experience*, and *a firm and unalterable experience*, againſt the exiſtence of all miracles, if he means by it ſuch an univerſal experience of all mankind as hath never been counteracted in any ſingle inſtance, this is plainly ſuppoſing the very thing in queſtion, and which he hath no right to ſuppoſe, becauſe, by his own acknowledgment, mankind have believed in all ages, that miracles have been really wrought. By uniform experience, therefore, in this argument muſt be underſtood, the general or ordinary experience of mankind in the uſual courſe of things. And it is ſo far from being true, as he confidently affirms, that ſuch an uniform experience amounts to a *full* and direct *proof*, from the nature of the fact, againſt the exiſtence of any miracle, that it is no proof againſt it at all. Let us judge of this by his own definition of a miracle. "A miracle," ſaith he, "may be accurately defined, a tranſgreſ-"ſion of a law of nature by a particular volition of the Deity, or "by the interpoſal of ſome inviſible agent." Now our uniform experience affordeth a full and direct proof, that ſuch or ſuch an event is agreeable to the eſtabliſhed laws of nature, or to the uſual courſe of things; but it yieldeth no proof at all, that there cannot in any particular inſtance happen any event contrary to that uſual courſe of things, or to what we have hitherto experienced; or that ſuch an event may not be brought about by a particular volition of the Deity, as our author expreſſeth it, for valuable ends worthy of his wiſdom and goodneſs.

He cannot therefore make his argument properly bear, except he can prove that miracles are abſolutely impoſſible. And this is what he ſometimes ſeems willing to attempt. Thus, ſpeaking of ſome miracles pretended to have been fully atteſted, he aſks, "What have we to oppoſe to ſuch a cloud of witneſſes, but "the abſolute impoſſibility, or miraculous nature of the event *?" where he ſeems to make the *miraculous nature* of an event, and

* Hume's Philoſophical Eſſays, p. 195.

the *abſolute impoſſibility* of it, to be the ſame thing. And he elſewhere makes an attempt to prove, that we have no reaſon to think, that God himſelf can effect a miracle. He urges, that "though the Being, to whom the miracle is aſcribed, be in this "caſe Almighty, it does not, upon that account, become a whit "more probable: ſince it is impoſſible for us to know the attri- "butes or acts of ſuch a Being, otherwiſe than from the ex- "perience we have of his productions in the uſual courſe of "nature*." But when once we conclude, from the effects in the works of nature, that he is Almighty, as this gentleman ſeems here to grant, we may, from his being Almighty, reaſonably infer, that he can do many things which we do not know that he hath actually done, and can produce many effects which he hath not actually produced: for an Almighty Being can do any thing that doth not imply a contradiction: and it can never be proved, that a miracle, or an event contrary to the uſual courſe of nature, implieth a contradiction. This writer himſelf expreſsly acknowledgeth, in a paſſage I cited before, that "it implies "no contradiction, that the courſe of nature may change†:" and he repeats it again afterwards, that "the courſe of nature "may change‡." And as to the extraordinarineſs of any fact, he ſaith, that "even in the moſt familiar events, the energy of "the cauſe is as unintelligible, as in the moſt extraordinary and "unuſual§." What we call the courſe of nature is the appointment of God, and the continuance of it dependeth upon his power and will: it is no more difficult to him to act contrary to it in any particular inſtance, than to act according to it. The one is in itſelf as eaſy to Almighty Power as the other. The true queſtion then is concerning the divine will, whether it can be ſuppoſed that God, having eſtabliſhed the courſe of nature, will ever permit or order a deviation from that regular courſe, which his own wiſdom hath eſtabliſhed: and with regard to this, it will be readily granted, that it is highly proper and wiſely appointed, that in the ordinary ſtate of things, what are commonly called the laws of nature ſhould be maintained, and that things ſhould generally go on in a fixed ſtated courſe and order; with-

* Hume's Philoſophical Eſſays, p. 95.
† Ibid. p. 62.
‡ Ibid. p. 66.
§ Ibid. p. 114.

out

out which there could be no regular ſtudy or knowledge of nature, no uſe or advantage of experience, either for the acquiſition of ſcience, or the conduct of life. But though it is manifeſtly proper, that theſe laws, or this courſe of things, ſhould generally take place, it would be an inexcuſable preſumption to affirm, that God, having eſtabliſhed theſe laws and this courſe of nature in the beginning, hath bound himſelf never to act otherwiſe than according to thoſe laws. There may be very good reaſons, worthy of his great wiſdom, for his acting ſometimes contrary to the uſual order of things. Nor can it in that caſe be juſtly pretended, that this would be contrary to the immutability of God, which is Spinoſa's great argument againſt miracles: for thoſe very variations, which appear ſo extraordinary to us, are comprehended within the general plan of his providence, and make a part of his original deſign. The ſame infinite wiſdom, which appointed or eſtabliſhed thoſe natural laws, did alſo appoint the deviations from them, or that they ſhould be overruled on ſome particular occaſions; which occaſions were alſo perfectly foreſeen from the beginning by his all-comprehending mind. If things were always to go on without the leaſt variation in the ſtated courſe, men might be apt to overlook or queſtion a moſt wiſe governing providence, and to aſcribe things (as ſome have done) to a fixed immutable fate or blind neceſſity, which they call nature. It may therefore be becoming the wiſdom of God to appoint, that there ſhould be, on particular occaſions, deviations from the uſual eſtabliſhed courſe of things. Such extraordinary operations and appearances may tend to awaken in mankind a ſenſe of a Supreme Diſpoſer and Governor of the world, who is a moſt wiſe and free as well as powerful Agent, and hath an abſolute dominion over nature; and may alſo anſwer important ends and purpoſes of moral government, for diſplaying God's juſtice and mercy, but eſpecially for giving atteſtation to the divine miſſion of perſons, whom he ſeeth fit to ſend on extraordinary errands, for inſtructing and reforming mankind, and for bringing diſcoveries of the higheſt importance to direct men to true religion and happineſs.

It appeareth then, that no argument can be brought from experience to prove, either that miracles are impoſſible to the power of God, or that they can never be agreeable to his will; and

therefore it is far from yielding a direct and full proof againſt the exiſtence of miracles. It may illuſtrate this to conſider ſome of the inſtances he himſelf mentions. "Lead cannot of itſelf remain ſuſpended in the air: Fire conſumes wood, and is extinguiſhed by water." Our uniform experience proves, that this is the uſual and ordinary courſe of things, and agreeable to the known laws of nature: it proves, that lead cannot naturally and ordinarily, or by its own force, be ſuſpended in the air; but it affordeth no proof at all, that it cannot be thus ſuſpended in a particular inſtance by the will of God, or by a ſupernatural force or power. In like manner our experience proves, that fire conſumes wood, in the natural courſe of things; but it yieldeth no proof, that, in a particular inſtance, the force of fire may not be ſuſpended or overruled, and the wood preſerved from being conſumed by the interpoſal of an inviſible agent. Another inſtance he mentions is, that "it is a miracle that a dead man ſhould "come to life; becauſe that has never been obſerved in any age "or country*:" but its never having been obſerved, if that had been the caſe, would have furniſhed no proof at all that a dead man cannot be raiſed to life by the power and will of God, when a moſt valuable and important end is to be anſwered by it. And if we have good evidence to convince us, that a man had been really dead, and that that man was afterwards really reſtored to life, (and this is a matter of fact of which our ſenſes can judge, as well as of any other fact whatſoever) no argument can be drawn from experience to prove that it could not be ſo. Our experience would indeed afford a proof, that no merely natural human power could effect it; or that it is a thing really miraculous, and contrary to the uſual courſe of nature: but it would not amount to a full and direct proof, nor indeed to any proof at all, that it could not be effected by the divine power.

And now we may judge of the propriety of the inference he draws from the argument, as he had managed it. "The plain "conſequence is," ſaith he, "and it is a general maxim worthy "of our attention, that no teſtimony is ſufficient to eſtabliſh a "miracle, unleſs the teſtimony be of ſuch a kind, that its falſe-"hood would be more miraculous than the fact which it endea-

* Hume's Philoſophical Eſſays, p. 181.

"vours

" yours to eſtabliſh: and even in that caſe, there is a mutual " deſtruction of arguments, and the ſuperiority only gives us an " aſſurance ſuitable to that degree of force, which remains after " deducting the inferior. When any one tells me, that he ſaw " a dead man reſtored to life, I immediately conſult with myſelf " whether it be more probable, that this perſon ſhould ever de- " ceive or be deceived, or that the fact he relates ſhould really " have happened: I weigh the one miracle againſt the other, and, " according to the ſuperiority which I diſcover, I pronounce my " deciſion, and always reject the greater miracle*."

You cannot but obſerve here, this writer's jingle upon the word *miracle*. As he had talked of proof againſt proof, ſo he here talks as if in the caſe he is ſuppoſing there were miracle againſt miracle; or as if the queſtion were concerning two extraordinary miraculous facts, the one of which is oppoſed to the other. But whereas in that caſe one ſhould think the greater miracle ought to take place againſt the leſſer, this gentleman, with whom miracle and abſurdity is the ſame thing, declares that he always *rejects the greater miracle*. But to quit this poor jingle, it is allowed, that the raiſing a dead man to life muſt, if ever it happened, have been a very ſignal miracle; *i. e.* as he defines it, a violation of the law of nature by a particular volition of the Deity. The queſtion therefore is, whether any evidence is given which may be depended on, to aſſure us, that however ſtrange or extraordinary this event may be, yet it hath actually happened. That the thing itſelf is poſſible to the Deity, however it be contrary to the uſual courſe of nature, cannot be reaſonably conteſted: becauſe it cannot be proved to involve a contradiction, or any thing beyond the reach of Almighty Power. For it would be to the laſt degree abſurd to ſay, that he who formed this ſtupendous ſyſtem, or who contrived and fabricated the wonderful frame of the human body, and originally gave it a principle of life, could not raiſe a dead man to life. It would be a contradiction, that the ſame man ſhould be living and dead at the ſame time, but not that he who was dead ſhould afterwards be reſtored to life: and therefore if it be the will of God, and his wiſdom and goodneſs ſeeth it proper for anſwering any very im-

* Hume's Philoſophical Eſſays, p. 184.

portant purpoſes, he is able to effect it. But then, whether he hath actually effected it, is another queſtion: and here it will be readily owned, that in a caſe of ſo extraordinary a nature, the evidence or teſtimony upon which we receive it, ought to be very ſtrong and cogent.

Mr. Hume is pleaſed here to put the caſe in a very looſe and general way. "When any one tells me," ſaith he, "that he ſaw "a dead man reſtored to life, I immediately conſider with myſelf, "whether it be more probable that this perſon ſhould either de- "ceive or be deceived, or that the fact he relates ſhould really "have happened." He puts it, as if there was nothing to depend upon but the teſtimony of a ſingle perſon, without any aſſignable reaſon for ſuch an extraordinary event; and when thus propoſed, naked of all circumſtances, no wonder that it hath an odd appearance! But that we may bring the queſtion to a fair iſſue, let us apply to it what our author without doubt had principally in his view, the reſurrection of our Lord Jeſus Chriſt. Taking the caſe therefore according to the repreſentation given of it in the holy Scriptures, let us examine whether, ſuppoſing all thoſe circumſtances to concur which are there exhibited, they do not amount to a full and ſatisfactory evidence, ſufficient to lay a juſt foundation for a reaſonable aſſent to it. Let us then ſuppoſe, that in a ſeries of writings publiſhed by different perſons in different ages, and all of them inconteſtably written long before the event happened, a glorious and wonderful perſon was foretold, and deſcribed by the moſt extraordinay characters, who ſhould be ſent from heaven to teach and inſtruct mankind, to guide them in the way of ſalvation, and to introduce an excellent diſpenſation of truth and righteouſneſs: That not only the nation and family from which he was to ſpring, the place of his birth, and time of his appearing, was diſtinctly pointed out, but it was foretold that he ſhould endure the moſt grievous ſufferings and death, and that afterwards he ſhould be exalted to a divine dominion and glory, and that the Gentiles ſhould be enlightened by his doctrine, and receive his law: That accordingly, at the time which had been ſignified in theſe predictions, that admirable Perſon appeared: That he taught a moſt pure and heavenly doctrine, preſcribed the moſt holy and excellent laws, and brought the moſt perfect ſcheme of religion which had ever been publiſhed

liſhed to the world; and at the ſame time exhibited in his own ſacred life and practice an example of the moſt conſummate holineſs and goodneſs: That in proof of his divine miſſion he performed the moſt wonderful works, manifeſtly tranſcending the utmoſt efforts of all human power or ſkill, and this in a vaſt number of inſtances, and in the moſt open and public manner, for a courſe of years together: That he moſt clearly and expreſsly foretold, that he was to undergo the moſt grievous ſufferings, and a cruel and ignominious death, and ſhould afterwards riſe again from the dead on the third day: And to this he appealed as the moſt convincing proof of his divine miſſion: That accordingly he ſuffered the death of the croſs, in the face of a vaſt multitude of ſpectators; and notwithſtanding the chief men of the Jewiſh nation, by whoſe inſtigation he was crucified, took the moſt prudent and effectual precautions to prevent an impoſition in this matter, he roſe again from the dead at the time appointed, with circumſtances of great glory, in a manner which ſtruck terror into the guards who were ſet to watch the ſepulchre: That afterwards he ſhewed himſelf alive to many of thoſe who were moſt intimately acquainted with him, and who, far from diſcovering a too forward credulity, could not be brought to believe it, till they found themſelves conſtrained to do ſo by the teſtimony of all their ſenſes: That as a farther proof of his reſurrection and exaltation, they who witneſſed it were themſelves enabled to perform the moſt wonderful miracles in his name, and by power derived from him, and were endued with the moſt extraordinary gifts and powers, that they might ſpread his religion through the world, amidſt the greateſt oppoſitions and diſcouragements: That accordingly this religion, though propagated by the ſeemingly meaneſt and moſt unlikely inſtruments, and not only deſtitute of all worldly advantages, but directly oppoſite to the prevailing ſuperſtitions, prejudices, and vices both of Jews and Gentiles, and though it expoſed its publiſhers and followers to all manner of reproaches, perſecutions, and ſufferings, yet in that very age made the moſt ſurpriſing progreſs; in conſequence of which the religion of Jeſus was eſtabliſhed in a conſiderable part of the world, and ſo continueth unto this day.

Such is the view of the evidence of the reſurrection of Jeſus; and, taking it altogether, it forms ſuch a concatenation of proofs,

as is every way ſuitable to the importance of the fact, and which was never equalled in any other caſe. To ſuppoſe all this evidence to have been given in atteſtation to a falſehood, involveth in it the moſt palpable abſurdities. It is to ſuppoſe, either that God would employ his own preſcience and power to give teſtimony to an impoſtor, by a ſeries of the moſt illuſtrious prophecies and numerous uncontrolled miracles; or, that good beings, ſuperior to man, would extraordinarily interpoſe for the ſame purpoſe, to countenance and derive credit to a perſon falſely pretending to be ſent from God, and feigning to act in his name; or, that evil ſpirits would uſe all their arts and their power to atteſt and confirm a religion, the manifeſt tendency of which was to deſtroy idolatry, ſuperſtition, and vice, wherever it was ſincerely believed and embraced, and to recover mankind to holineſs and happineſs; which is a contradiction to their very nature and character: It is to ſuppoſe, that a number of perſons would combine in atteſting falſehoods, in favour of a perſon who they knew had deceived them, and of a religion contrary to their moſt inveterate and favourite prejudices, and by which they had a proſpect of gaining nothing but miſery, reproach, ſufferings, and death; which is abſolutely contrary to all the principles and paſſions of the human nature: It is to ſuppoſe, that perſons of the greateſt ſimplicity and plainneſs would act the part of the vileſt impoſtors; or, that men who were ſo bad, ſo falſe, and impious, as to be capable of carrying on a ſeries of the moſt ſolemn impoſitions in the name of God himſelf, would, at the hazard of all that is dear to men, and in manifeſt oppoſition to all their worldly intereſts, endeavour to bring over the nations to embrace a holy and ſelf-denying inſtitution; or, that they were enthuſiaſts, who were carried away by the heat of their own diſtempered brains to imagine, that for a ſeries of years together the moſt extraordinary facts were done before their eyes, though no ſuch things were done at all, and that they were themſelves enabled actually to perform the moſt wonderful works in the moſt open and public manner, though they performed no ſuch works: It is to ſuppoſe, that ſuch mad enthuſiaſts, who were alſo mean and contemptible in their condition, and for the moſt part ignorant and illiterate, were not only capable of forming the nobleſt ſcheme of religion which was ever publiſhed to mankind, but were able to overcome all the learning,

ing, wealth, power, eloquence of the world, all the bigotry and ſuperſtition of the nations, all the influence and artifices of the prieſts, all the power and authority of the magiſtrates: That they did this by only alledging, that they had a commiſſion in the name of a perſon who had been crucified, whom they affirmed, but without giving any proof of it, to have been riſen from the dead, and to be exalted as the Saviour and Lord of mankind: All this is ſuch a complication of abſurdities, as cannot be admitted but upon principles that are abſolutely abhorrent to the common ſenſe and reaſon of men. It were eaſy to enlarge farther on this ſubject; but this may ſuffice at preſent, eſpecially conſidering that Mr. Adams hath urged many things to this purpoſe with great clearneſs and force, in his anſwer to Mr. Hume's Eſſay, p. 31—36. And what is there to oppoſe to all this? Nothing but the ſingle difficulty of reſtoring a dead man to life, which is indeed a very extraordinary and miraculous event, but is not above the power of God to effect, and, ſuppoſing a good and valid reaſon can be aſſigned for it worthy of the divine wiſdom and goodneſs, involveth in it no abſurdity at all. And ſuch a reaſon it certainly was, to give an illuſtrious atteſtation to the divine miſſion of the holy Jeſus, and to the divine original of the moſt excellent diſpenſation of religion that was ever publiſhed among men. To talk, as this author does, of the diminution of the evidence in proportion to the difficulty of the caſe, is trifling; for the evidence is here ſuppoſed to be fully proportioned to the difficulty and importance of the caſe; ſince there is both a power aſſigned every way able to effect it, and a valuable end, which makes it reaſonable to think it was becoming the divine wiſdom and goodneſs to interpoſe for effecting it.

You will perhaps think this may be ſufficient with regard to the firſt part of Mr. Hume's *Eſſay on Miracles*. In my next I ſhall endeavour to make it appear, that we have the higheſt reaſon to think, that the evidence, which hath been argued to be ſufficient if given, was really and actually given: and ſhall anſwer the ſeveral conſiderations he hath offered to ſhew, that ſuppoſing miracles capable of being proved by evidence or teſtimony, yet no evidence was ever actually given for miracles, which can be reaſonably depended upon.

LET-

LETTER XIX.

Reflections on the ſecond Part of Mr. Hume's Eſſay on Miracles, *which is deſigned to ſhew, that in fact there never was a miraculous Event eſtabliſhed upon ſuch Evidence as can be depended on—What he offers, concerning the neceſſary Conditions and Qualifications of Witneſſes in the Caſe of Miracles, conſidered—It is ſhewn, that the Witneſſes to the Miracles in Proof of Chriſtianity had all the Conditions and Qualifications that can be required to render any Teſtimony good and valid—Concerning the Proneneſs of Mankind in all Ages to believe Wonders, eſpecially in Matters of Religion—This no Reaſon for rejecting all Miracles without farther Examination—The Miracles wrought in Proof of Chriſtianity not done in an ignorant and barbarous Age—His Pretence, that different Miracles wrought in favour of different Religions deſtroy one another, and ſhew that none of them are true—The Abſurdity of this Way of Reaſoning ſhewn—Inſtances produced by him of Miracles well atteſted, and which yet ought to be rejected as falſe and incredible—A particular Examination of what he hath offered concerning the Miracles attributed to the Abbé de Paris, and which he pretends much ſurpaſs thoſe of our Saviour in Credit and Authority.*

SIR,

I NOW proceed to conſider the ſecond part of Mr. Hume's *Eſſay on Miracles*. The firſt was deſigned to ſhew, that miracles are incapable of being proved by any evidence whatſoever, and that no evidence or teſtimony that could be given, let us ſuppoſe it ever ſo full and ſtrong, would be a ſufficient ground for believing the truth and exiſtence of miracles. And now in his ſecond part he proceeds to ſhew, that ſuppoſing a miracle capable of being proved by full and ſufficient evidence or teſtimony, yet in fact there never was a *miraculous event* in any hiſtory eſtabliſhed upon ſuch evidence as can reaſonably be depended upon. To this purpoſe he offereth ſeveral conſiderations. The firſt is deſigned to prove, that no witneſſes have ever been produced

duced for any miracle, which have all the neceſſary conditions and qualifications, to render their teſtimony credible. The ſecond conſideration is drawn from the proneneſs there has been in mankind in all ages to believe wonders; and the more for their being abſurd and incredible; eſpecially in matters of religion; and that therefore in this caſe all men of ſenſe ſhould reject them without farther examination. His third obſervation is, that they are always found to abound moſt among ignorant and barbarous nations. His fourth obſervation is drawn from the oppoſite miracles wrought in different religions, which deſtroy one another; ſo that there is no miracle wrought, but what is oppoſed by an infinite number of others. He then goes on to give an account of ſome miraculous facts which ſeem to be well atteſted, and yet are to be rejected as falſe and incredible. This is the ſubſtance of this part of his Eſſay, which he concludes with an inſolent boaſt, as if he thought he had ſo clearly demonſtrated what he undertook, that no man who had not his *underſtanding* miraculouſly ſubverted could oppoſe it. But I apprehend it will appear, upon a diſtinct examination of what he hath offered, that there is little ground for ſuch confident boaſting.

The principal conſideration is that which he hath mentioned in the firſt place, drawn from the want of competent teſtimony to aſcertain the truth of miraculous facts. He affirms, "that "there is not to be found in all hiſtory any miracle atteſted by "a ſufficient number of men, of ſuch unqueſtionable good ſenſe, "education, and learning, as to ſecure us againſt all deluſion in "themſelves; of ſuch undoubted integrity, as to place them be"yond all ſuſpicion of any deſign to deceive others; of ſuch "credit and reputation in the eyes of mankind, as to have a great "deal to loſe in caſe of being detected in any falſehood; and "at the ſame time atteſting facts performed in ſuch a public man"ner and in ſo celebrated a part of the world, as to render the "detection unavoidable: all which circumſtances are requiſite "to give us a full aſſurance in the teſtimony of men*."

Here he ſuppoſes, that where theſe circumſtances concur, we may have *full aſſurance in the teſtimony of men* concerning the

* Hume's Philoſophical Eſſays, p. 183.

facts

facts they relate, however extraordinary and unuſual. Let us therefore examine the conditions and qualifications he inſiſts upon, as neceſſary to render a teſtimony good and valid, and apply them to the teſtimony of the witneſſes of Chriſtianity, and the extraordinary miraculous facts whereby it was confirmed, eſpecially that of our Saviour's reſurrection.

The firſt thing he inſiſteth upon is, that the miracle ſhould be *atteſted by a ſufficient number of men.* He hath not told us what number of witneſſes he takes to be ſufficient in ſuch a caſe. In ſome caſes very few may be ſufficient: yea, a ſingle evidence may be ſo circumſtanced as to produce a ſufficient aſſurance and conviction in the mind, even concerning a fact of an extraordinary nature; though where there is a concurrence of many good witneſſes, it is undoubtedly an advantage, and tendeth to give farther force to the evidence. And as to this, Chriſtianity hath all the advantages, that can reaſonably be deſired. All the apoſtles were the authorized witneſſes of the principal facts by which Chriſtianity is atteſted; ſo were the ſeventy diſciples, and the hundred-and-twenty, mentioned Acts ii. 15. 21, 22. who had been with Jeſus from the commencement of his perſonal miniſtry to his aſcenſion into heaven; to which might be added many others who had ſeen his illuſtrious miracles, as well as heard his excellent inſtructions. The accounts of theſe things were publiſhed in that very age, and the facts were repreſented as having been done, and the diſcourſes as having been delivered, in the preſence of multitudes; ſo that in effect they appealed to thouſands in Judea, Jeruſalem, and Galilee. It is true, that as to the reſurrection of Chriſt, this was not a fact done before all the people; but there was a number of witneſſes to it, ſufficient to atteſt any fact. Chriſt ſhewed himſelf alive after his paſſion to ſeveral perſons at different times; whoſe teſtimony give mutual ſupport and force to one another. He ſhewed himſelf alſo to all the apoſtles in a body, to ſeveral other diſciples, and at laſt to five hundred at once. To which it may be added, that all the extraordinary facts and wonderful works wrought by the apoſtles and firſt publiſhers of Chriſtianity, many of which were of a very public nature, and done in the view of multitudes, came in aid of their teſtimony.

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As to the qualifications of the witneſſes, the firſt thing he requireth is, that "they ſhould be of ſuch unqueſtioned good ſenſe, "education, and learning, as to ſecure us againſt all deluſion in "themſelves." The reaſon why this gentleman here mentioneth *learning* and *education*, as neceſſary qualifications in witneſſes, is evident. It is undoubtedly with a view to exclude the apoſtles, who, except St. Paul, appear not to have been perſons of education and learning. But no court of judicature, in inquiring into facts, looks upon it to be neceſſary that the perſons giving teſtimony to the truth of thoſe facts ſhould be perſons who had a learned education: it is ſufficient, if they appear to be perſons of ſound ſenſe and honeſt characters, and that the facts were ſuch as they had an opportunity of being well acquainted with. And thus it was with regard to the firſt witneſſes of Chriſtianity. They were not indeed perſons eminent for their learning, knowledge, and experience in the world: if they had been ſo, this might probably have been regarded as a ſuſpicious circumſtance, as if they had themſelves laid the ſcheme, and it was the effect of their own art and contrivance. But they were perſons of plain ſenſe, and ſound underſtanding, and perfectly acquainted with the facts they relate. This ſufficiently appeareth from their writings, and the accounts they have left us. Their narrations are plain and conſiſtent, delivered in a ſimple unaffected ſtile, without any pomp of words, or oſtentation of eloquence or literature on the one hand, and on the other without any of the rants of enthuſiaſm. All is calm, cool, and ſedate, the argument of a compoſed ſpirit. There is nothing that betrayeth an over-heated imagination: nor do they ever fly out into paſſionate exclamations, even where the ſubject might ſeem to warrant it. The facts they relate were of ſuch a nature, and ſo circumſtanced, that they could not themſelves be deceived in them, ſuppoſing they had their ſenſes, or be made to believe they were done before their eyes when they were not done. This muſt be acknowledged as to the facts done during Chriſt's perſonal miniſtry. For they were conſtantly with him in his going out and coming in, and had an opportunity of obſerving thoſe facts in all their circumſtances for a courſe of years together; and therefore could be as perfectly aſſured of them, as any man can be of any facts whatſoever, which he himſelf hears and ſees. And as to his reſurrection, they were not

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forward raſhly to give credit to it by an enthuſiaſtic heat: they examined it ſcrupulouſly, and would not receive it, till compelled by irreſiſtible evidence, and by the teſtimony of all their ſenſes.

The next thing he inſiſteth upon is, that "the witneſſes ſhould "be of ſuch undoubted integrity, as to place them beyond all "ſuſpicion of any deſign to deceive others." Apply this to the witneſſes of the miraculous facts whereby Chriſtianity was atteſted, and it will appear, that never were there perſons who were more remote from all reaſonable ſuſpicion of fraud, or a deſign to impoſe falſehoods upon mankind. They appeared by their whole temper and conduct to be perſons of great probity and unaffected ſimplicity, ſtrangers to artful cunning, and the refinements of human policy. It mightily ſtrengthens this when it is conſidered, that, as the caſe was circumſtanced, they could have no temptation to endeavour to impoſe theſe things upon the world if they had not been true, but had the ſtrongeſt inducements to the contrary. They could have no proſpect of ſerving their worldly intereſt, or anſwering the ends of ambition, by preaching up a religion, contrary to all the prevailing paſſions and prejudices of Jews and Gentiles, a principal article of which was ſalvation through a crucified Jeſus. They could ſcarce have had a reaſonable expectation of gaining ſo much as a ſingle proſelyte, to ſo abſurd and fooliſh a ſcheme, as it muſt have been, ſuppoſing they had known that all was falſe, and that Jeſus had never riſen at all. How could it have been expected in ſuch a caſe, that they ſhould be able to perſuade the Jews to receive for their Meſſiah, one that had been put to an ignominious death by the heads of their nation, as an impoſtor and deceiver? or, that they ſhould perſuade the Gentiles to acknowledge and worſhip a crucified Jew for their Lord, in preference to their long-adored deities, and to abandon all their darling ſuperſtitions for a ſtrict and ſelf-denying diſcipline? The only thing that can be pretended as a poſſible inducement to them, to endeavour to impoſe upon mankind, is what this writer afterwards mentions. "What greater "temptation," ſaith he, "than to appear a miſſionary, a prophet, "and ambaſſador from heaven? Who would not encounter many "dangers and difficulties, to attain ſo ſublime a character? or, "if perſuaded of it himſelf, would ſcruple a pious fraud in proſ-

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"pect of ſo holy an end*?" But there is no room for ſuch a ſuſpicion in the caſe we are now conſidering. If they had pretended a revelation in favour of a Meſſiah, ſuited to the Jewiſh carnal notions and prejudices, who was to erect a mighty worldly dominion, arrayed with all the pomp of ſecular glory and grandeur, they might have expected honour and applauſe in being looked upon as his miniſters. But what honour could they propoſe, from being regarded as the diſciples and apoſtles of one that had been condemned, and put to a ſhameful death by public authority? To ſet up as his ambaſſadors, and pretend to be inſpired by his ſpirit, and to be commiſſioned by him to go through the world, preaching up Jeſus Chriſt, and him crucified; this was in all appearance the readieſt way they could take to expoſe themſelves to general ſcorn, deriſion, and reproach: and they muſt have been abſolutely out of their ſenſes, to have expected, that any veneration ſhould be paid to them under this character, ſuppoſing they had no other proof to bring of their crucified maſter's being riſen, and exalted in glory as the univerſal Lord and Saviour, but their own word. Thus it appears, that they could have no inducements or temptations, according to all the principles or motives that uſually work upon the human mind, to attempt to impoſe this ſcheme of religion, and the facts by which it was ſupported, if they had known them to be falſe: and if they had been falſe, they muſt have known them to be ſo. But this is not all. They had the ſtrongeſt poſſible inducements to the contrary. The ſcheme of religion they preached, and which theſe facts were deſigned to atteſt, was directly oppoſite to their own moſt rooted prejudices. On the ſuppoſition of Chriſt's not having riſen, they muſt have been ſenſible that he had deceived them; that the promiſes and predictions with which he had amuſed them were falſe; and that conſequently they could have no hopes from him, either in this world or in the next. At the ſame time they could not but foreſee, that by pretending he was riſen from the dead, and ſetting him up for the Meſſiah after he had been crucified, they ſhould incur the indignation of the body of their own nation, and the hatred and contempt of thoſe in chief authority among them. They could not poſſibly expect any thing but what they

* Hume's Philoſophical Eſſays, p. 200.

met with, perſecutions, reproaches, ſhame, and ſufferings, both from Jews and Gentiles. Their expoſing themſelves to theſe things may be accounted for, if they were perſuaded that what they witneſſed was really true, though even in that caſe it required great virtue and conſtancy, and divine ſupports. But that they ſhould, in manifeſt oppoſition to their own religious prejudices and worldly intereſts, without the leaſt proſpect of any thing to be gained by it here or hereafter, perſiſt to the very death in atteſting a falſehood, known by themſelves to be ſo; and that they ſhould, for the ſake of one who they knew had deceived them, expoſe themſelves to the greateſt evils and ſufferings, to which all men have naturally the ſtrongeſt averſion, is a ſuppoſition that cannot be admitted with the leaſt appearance of reaſon, as being abſolutely ſubverſive of all the principles and paſſions of human nature. Our author ought to acknowledge the force of this reaſoning, ſince he taketh pains throughout his whole Eſſay on Liberty and Neceſſity, to ſhew, that we may in many caſes argue as ſurely and ſtrongly from the power and influence of motives on the human mind, as from the influence of phyſical cauſes; and that there is as great a certainty, and as neceſſary a connexion in what are called moral cauſes as in phyſical. This author undoubtedly in that eſſay carrieth it too far, when, in order to ſubvert human liberty, he would have it thought, that in all caſes the power of motives worketh with as neceſſary a force upon the mind, as any phyſical cauſe doth upon the effect. But that in many particular caſes things may be ſo circumſtanced with regard to moral cauſes, as to afford a certainty equal to what ariſes from phyſical, cannot reaſonably be denied. And ſuch is the caſe here put. And he expreſsly declareth, that "we "cannot make uſe of a more convincing argument than to prove, "that the actions aſcribed to any perſon are contrary to the courſe "of nature, and that no human motives in ſuch circumſtances "could ever induce them to ſuch a conduct*."

This writer farther requireth, that "the witneſſes ſhould be "of ſuch credit and reputation in the eyes of mankind as to have "a great deal to loſe in caſe of being detected in any falſehood." If the meaning be, that they muſt be perſons diſtinguiſhed by

* Hume's Philoſophical Eſſays, p. 135.

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their rank and ſituation in the world, and of great reputation for knowledge, and for the eminency of their ſtation and figure in life; this in the caſe here referred to would, inſtead of ſtrengthening, have greatly weakened the force of their teſtimony. It might have been ſaid, with ſome ſhew of plauſibility, that ſuch perſons, by their knowledge and abilities, their reputation and intereſt, might have it in their power to countenance and propagate an impoſture among the people, and give it ſome credit in the world. If the facts recorded in the goſpel, the miracles and reſurrection of Jeſus Chriſt, had been patronized and atteſted by the chief prieſts and rulers of the Jewiſh nation, it would undoubtedly have been pretended, that they had political deſigns in view, and that, conſidering their authority and influence, they might more eaſily impoſe thoſe things upon the multitude. On this view of things, the evidence for thoſe important facts would have been far leſs convincing than now it is. And therefore the Divine wiſdom hath ordered it far better, in appointing that the firſt witneſſes of the goſpel were not the worldly *wiſe*, *mighty*, or *noble*, but perſons of mean condition, and yet of honeſt characters, without power, authority, or intereſt. And whereas this writer urgeth, that the witneſſes ought to be of *ſuch reputation as to have a great deal to loſe in caſe of being detected in a falſehood*, it ought to be conſidered, that a man of true probity, though in a low condition, may be as unwilling to be branded as a cheat and an impoſtor, and as deſirous to preſerve his good name, which may be almoſt all he has to value himſelf upon, as perſons of greater figure and eminence in the world, who may more eaſily find means to ſupport themſelves, and to evade detection and puniſhment. The apoſtles indeed rejoiced that they were counted *worthy to ſuffer ſhame for the name of Chriſt*, Acts v. 41. But this was not owing to their being inſenſible to ſhame, but to the teſtimony of a good conſcience, and to the full perſuaſion they had of Chriſt's divine miſſion, and the divinity of the religion they preached in his name. This particularly was the principle upon which St. Paul acted, who was a man of reputation among the Jews, and would never have made a ſacrifice of this, and of all his worldly intereſts and expectations, to join himſelf to a deſpiſed perſecuted party, and againſt whom he himſelf had conceived the ſtrongeſt prejudices, if he had not

been brought over, by an evidence which he was not able to reſiſt, to the acknowledgment of the Chriſtian faith, and of the extraordinary facts on which it was eſtabliſhed.

The laſt thing he inſiſteth upon is, that the facts atteſted by the witneſſes ſhould be "performed in ſuch a public manner, "and in ſo celebrated a part of the world, as to render the detec- "tion unavoidable." This may be applied with the greateſt propriety to the extraordinary and miraculous facts by which Chriſtianity was atteſted. Juſtly doth St. Paul appeal to King Agrippa, in the admirable apology he made before him and the Roman Governor, Feſtus, and which was delivered before a numerous and auguſt aſſembly of Jews and Romans, that *none of theſe things were hidden from him: for*, ſaith he, *this thing was not done in a corner*, Acts xxvi. 26. Chriſt's whole perſonal miniſtry, and the wonderful works he wrought, were tranſacted not in a private and ſecret, but in the moſt open and public manner poſſible, in places of the greateſt concourſe, and before multitudes of people aſſembled from all parts. The ſame may be ſaid of many of the miracles wrought by the apoſtles in the name and by the power of a riſen Jeſus: and particularly never was there any event of a more public nature than the extraordinary effuſion of the Holy Ghoſt on the day of Pentecoſt. The firſt publiſhers of Chriſtianity preached the religion of Jeſus, and performed miracles in confirmation of it, not merely in ſmall villages, or obſcure parts of the country, but in populous cities, in thoſe parts of the world that were moſt celebrated for the liberal arts, learning and politeneſs. They publiſhed their religion, and the wonderful facts by which it was ſupported, throughout the Leſſer Aſia, Greece, Italy; in the cities of Jeruſalem, Antioch, Epheſus, Corinth, Theſſalonica, Philippi, Athens, and Rome itſelf. If therefore their pretences had been falſe, they could ſcarce have poſſibly eſcaped a detection: eſpecially conſidering that they were every-where under the eye of watchful adverſaries, unbelieving Jews as well as heathens, who would not have failed to detect and expoſe the impoſture, if there had been any. As to what the author afterward allegeth, that "in "the infancy of new religions the wiſe and learned commonly "eſteem the matter too inconſiderable to deſerve their attention "and regard; and when afterwards they would willingly de-

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" teſt the cheat, in order to undeceive the deluded multitude, "the ſeaſon is now gone, and the records and witneſſes, who " might clear up the matter, are periſhed beyond recovery*;" this pretence hath no place in the caſe we are now conſidering with regard to Chriſtianity. That religion met with the greateſt oppoſition even in its infancy. Perſons of principal authority in the nation where it firſt aroſe, bent their attention, and employed their power, to ſuppreſs it. And in all places where it was afterwards propagated, there were unbelieving Jews, who uſed their utmoſt efforts to ſtir up the heathens againſt it, who of themſelves were ſtrongly inclined by their own prejudices to oppoſe it: and this at the very time when, if the facts had been falſe, it would have been the eaſieſt thing in the world to have detected the falſehood; which in that caſe muſt have been known to thouſands: ſince many of the facts appealed to were of a very public nature.

Thus I have conſidered the conditions and qualifications he inſiſteth upon, as neceſſary to give us a *full aſſurance in the teſtimony of men* with regard to miracles; and have ſhewn, that all the conditions that can be reaſonably deſired, concur, with the higheſt degree of evidence, in the teſtimony given by the apoſtles and firſt witneſſes of Chriſtianity, to the extraordinary facts whereby its divine authority was eſtabliſhed. Their teſtimony had ſome advantages which no other teſtimony ever had. St. Luke obſerves, that *with great power gave the apoſtles witneſs of the reſurrection of the Lord Jeſus*, Acts iv. 33. The teſtimony they gave was accompanied with a Divine power. The force of their teſtimony did not depend merely on their own veracity, but may be ſaid to have been confirmed by the atteſtation of God himſelf. It is with the utmoſt propriety therefore, that the ſacred writer of the Epiſtle to the Hebrews repreſenteth God, as *bearing them witneſs, both with ſigns and wonders, and with divers miracles and gifts of the Holy Ghoſt, according to his own will*, Heb. ii. 4. And it is inconteſtably true in fact, that ſo ſtrong and convincing was the evidence, that great numbers both of Jews and Gentiles were brought over in that very age to the faith of a crucified and riſen Saviour. Nor was this the

* Hume's Philoſophical Eſſays, p. 202.

effect of a too forward credulity, ſince it was in direct oppoſition to their prejudices, paſſions, and worldly intereſts. The principles and inducements which uſually lead men to form wrong and partial judgments, lay wholly on the other ſide, and, inſtead of being favourable to Chriſtianity, tended rather to determine men to diſbelieve and reject it. So that it may be juſtly ſaid, that the propagation of that ſcheme of religion which is held forth in the goſpel had ſomething in it ſo wonderful, taking in all the circumſtances of the caſe, that it affordeth a manifeſt and moſt convincing proof of the truth of the extraordinary facts upon which it was founded.

I now proceed to make ſome obſervations upon the other conſiderations this gentleman offers in this ſecond part of his eſſay; and which indeed can at beſt paſs for no more than preſumptions; and only ſhew, that the teſtimony given to miracles is not raſhly to be admitted, and that great care and caution is neceſſary in judging of them, which will be eaſily allowed.

The ſecond conſideration, and upon which he ſeems to lay a great ſtreſs, is this: that "we may obſerve in human nature a "principle, which, if ſtrictly examined, will be found to diminiſh extremely the aſſurance we might have from human teſtimony in any kind of prodigy." He ſays, "that though for "the moſt part we readily reject any fact that is unuſual and incredible in an ordinary degree, yet when any thing is affirmed "utterly abſurd and miraculous, the mind rather more readily "admits ſuch a fact, upon account of that very circumſtance, "which ought to deſtroy all its authority. The paſſion of *ſurpriſe* and *wonder* ariſing from miracles, being an agreeable "emotion, gives a ſenſible tendency towards the belief of thoſe "events from which it is derived—— But if the ſpirit of religion "join itſelf to the love of wonder, there is an end of common "ſenſe; and human teſtimony in theſe circumſtances loſes all "pretenſions to authority*." And again he obſerves, that "ſhould a miracle be aſcribed to any new ſyſtem of religion, "men in all ages have been ſo much impoſed on by the ridiculous ſtories of this kind, that this very circumſtance will be "a full proof of a cheat, and ſufficient with all men of ſenſe,

* Hume's Philoſophical Eſſays, 184, 185.

"not

" not only to make them reject the fact, but even reject it with-
" out farther examination." And he repeats it again, that it
" ſhould make us form a general reſolution never to lend any
" attention to it, with whatever ſpecious pretext it may be
" covered *." He here undertaketh to anſwer for all *men of ſenſe*, that they will reject all miracles produced in proof of religion without farther examination; becauſe men in all ages have been much impoſed on by ridiculous ſtories of this kind. But this certainly is the language, not of reaſon and good ſenſe, which will diſpoſe a man fairly to examine, but of the moſt obſtinate prepoſſeſſion and prejudice. No kinds of hiſtorical facts, whether of an ordinary or extraordinary nature, can be mentioned, in which men have not been frequently impoſed upon. But this is no juſt reaſon for rejecting ſuch facts at once without examination: and the man that would do ſo, inſtead of proving his ſuperior good ſenſe, would only render himſelf ridiculous. That there have been many falſe miracles will be readily acknowledged; but this doth not prove that there never have been any true ones. It ought indeed to make us very cautious, and to examine miracles carefully before we receive them; but it is no reaſon at all, or a very abſurd one, for rejecting them all at once without examination and inquiry. Thus to reject them can only be juſtified upon this principle, that it is not poſſible there ſhould be a true miracle wrought in favour of any ſyſtem of religion. But by what medium will he undertake to prove this? He ſeems expreſsly to admit, that in other caſes, " there may poſſibly be
" miracles, or violations of the uſual courſe of nature, of ſuch
" a kind as to admit of proof from human teſtimony *." This conceſſion is not very conſiſtent with what he had laboured in the firſt part of his eſſay to ſhew, with regard to all miracles in general, *viz.* that they are incapable of being proved by any teſtimony. But now, provided miracles be not produced in proof of religion, he ſeems willing to allow, that they may *poſſibly admit of proof from human teſtimony*. The only caſe therefore in which they are never to be believed, is when they are pretended to be wrought in favour of religion. But in this he ſeems to have both the reaſon of the thing, and the general ſenſe

* Hume's Philoſophical Eſſays, p. 204, 205. Ibid. p. 203.

of mankind, againſt him. It is certainly more reaſonable to believe a miracle, when a valuable end can be aſſigned for it, than to believe it when we cannot diſcern any important end to be anſwered by it at all. And one of the moſt valuable ends for which a miracle can be ſuppoſed to be wrought ſeems to be this, to give an atteſtation to the divine miſſion of perſons ſent to inſtruct mankind in religious truths of great importance, and to lead them in the way of ſalvation. Our author ſeems ſometimes to lay a mighty ſtreſs on the general opinion and common *ſentiments* of mankind*." And there are few notions, which, by his own acknowledgment, have more generally obtained in all nations and ages, than this, that there have been miracles actually wrought on ſome occaſions, eſpecially in matters of religion, and that they are to be regarded as proofs of a divine interpoſition. This is a principle which ſeems to be conformable to the natural ſenſe of the human mind.

The obſervation he makes concerning the *agreeable emotion* produced by the *paſſion of wonder and ſurprize*, and the ſtrong propenſity *there is in mankind to the extraordinary and the marvellous*, proves nothing againſt this principle. The paſſion of wonder and ſurprize was certainly not given us in vain, but for very wiſe purpoſes; and it may be preſumed, that this paſſion, as well as others, may be rightly exerciſed upon proper objects. But I cannot agree with this gentleman, that men are naturally diſpoſed and inclined to believe a thing the rather for its being *utterly abſurd and miraculous*, eſpecially in matters of religion. They may indeed, and often do, believe abſurdities; but they never believe a thing merely becauſe it is abſurd, but becauſe, taking all conſiderations together, they do not look upon it to be abſurd. It may be obſerved by the way, that this writer here makes *abſurd* and *miraculous* to be terms of the ſame ſignification, whereas they are very different ideas. A miracle, when ſuppoſed to be wrought by a power adequate to the effect, and for excellent ends, is indeed wonderful, but has no abſurdity in it at all. It is true, there have often been very abſurd things recommended to popular belief under the notion of miracles; and ſuch pretended miracles have been received without much examina-

* Hume's Eſſays, moral and political, p. 307.

tion,

tion, when wrought in favour of the eſtabliſhed ſuperſtition. But even real miracles are received with difficulty, when they are wrought in oppoſition to it; and where the influence of the prieſthood, the prejudices of the vulgar, and the authority of the magiſtrate, are on the one ſide; which was the caſe of Chriſtianity at its firſt appearance. Conſidering the nature of that religion, how contrary it was to the prevailing notions and prejudices both of Jews and Gentiles, the ſtrictneſs of the morals it preſcribed, the ſcheme of ſalvation through a crucified Saviour which it propoſed, the meanneſs of the inſtruments by which it was propagated, and the numberleſs difficulties it had to encounter with; the miracles wrought in atteſtation of it could not have met with a favourable reception in the world, if there had not been the moſt convincing evidence of their being really wrought. The ſtrangeneſs of the facts, inſtead of producing belief, would rather have turned to its diſadvantage, and could ſcarce have failed being detected in ſuch circumſtances, if they had been falſe.

His third obſervation is, that it "forms a very ſtrong preſumption againſt all ſupernatural relations, that they are always found "chiefly to abound among ignorant and barbarous nations; or "if a civilized people have ever given admiſſion to any of "them, they have received them from ignorant and barbarous "anceſtors*." But no preſumption can be drawn from this to the prejudice of Chriſtianity, which did not make its appearance in an ignorant and barbarous age, but at a time when the world was greatly civilized, and in nations where arts and learning had made a very great progreſs. And it muſt be conſidered, that it had not only their inveterate prejudices, their darling paſſions, and inclinations, but their pretended miracles to encounter with; extraordinary facts received from their anceſtors, who *tranſmitted them*, as he expreſſeth it, *with that inviolable ſanction and authority, which always attends ancient and received opinions.* How ſtrong and cogent therefore muſt the force of the evidence in behalf of the Chriſtian religion, and the extraordinary miraculous facts deſigned to ſupport it, have been, which, in the hands of ſuch mean inſtruments, could make ſo great a progreſs in a

* Hume's Philoſophical Eſſays, p. 186, 187.

civilized

civilized and enlightened age, and prove too hard for the religion of the empire; which, beſides its being interwoven with the civil eſtabliſhment, had the preſcription of many ages to plead, and was ſupported by pretended miracles, prodigies, and oracles! Mr. Hume is pleaſed to take notice on this occaſion of the management of that cunning impoſtor, Alexander*. But though, the better to carry on the cheat, he had laid the ſcene among the barbarous Paphlagonians, who were reckoned among the moſt ſtupid and ignorant of the human race; and not only put in practice all the arts of impoſture (though it doth not appear, that he pretended to work miracles among the people, or put the proof of his authority upon them), but had procured a powerful intereſt among the great to ſupport him, he and his impoſtures ſoon ſunk into oblivion, and ſo undoubtedly would Chriſtianity too have done, if its extraordinary facts had no better foundation in truth and fact than his pretenſions had.

"I may add," ſaith he, "as a fourth reaſon which diminiſhes "the authority of prodigies, that there is no teſtimony for any, "even thoſe which have not been expreſsly detected, that is not "oppoſed by an *infinite* number of witneſſes; ſo that not only "the miracle deſtroys the credit of the teſtimony, but even the "teſtimony deſtroys itſelf." He goes on to obſerve, that "in "matters of religion, whatever is different is contrary: that it is "impoſſible that all theſe different religions ſhould be eſtabliſhed "on a ſolid foundation: that every miracle pretended to have "been wrought in any of theſe religions, as it is deſigned to "eſtabliſh that particular ſyſtem, has the ſame force to overthrow "every other ſyſtem; and conſequently to deſtroy the "credit of thoſe miracles on which that ſyſtem was eſtabliſhed. "So that all the prodigies of different religions are to be regarded as contrary facts, and the evidences of thoſe prodigies as "oppoſite to one another†." This writer is here pleaſed to confound *prodigies* and *miracles*, which ought to be diſtinguiſhed. Many things that have paſſed under the notion of prodigies, are very far from being miracles, in the ſtrict and proper ſenſe in which we are now conſidering them: and if we ſpeak of

* Hume's Philoſophical Eſſays, p. 188, 189. † Ibid. p. 190, 191.

miracles

miracles properly ſo called, the ſuppoſition he here goes upon, *viz.* that all religions have been founded upon miracles, and have put the proof of their authority upon them, is manifeſtly falſe. It is well known, that Mahomet did not pretend to eſtabliſh his religion by miracles; nor indeed can it be proved, that any ſyſtems of religion had any tolerable pretenſion of being originally founded upon miracles, but the Jewiſh and the Chriſtian; and theſe, though in ſome reſpects *different*, are not *contrary*, but mutually ſupport each other; the former being introductive and preparatory to the latter. But if his ſuppoſition ſhould be admitted, that all religions in the world have been founded upon the credit of miracles, it is hard to comprehend the force of his reaſoning. By what logic doth it follow, that becauſe miracles have been believed by mankind in all ages and nations to have been wrought in proof of religion, therefore miracles were never really wrought at all in proof of religion, nor are they ever to be believed in any ſingle inſtance? With the ſame force it may be argued, that becauſe there have been and are many oppoſite ſchemes of religion in the world, therefore their being oppoſite to one another proves that they are all falſe, and that there is no ſuch thing as true religion in the world at all. But let us ſuppoſe ever ſo great a number of falſehoods oppoſed to truth, that oppoſition of falſehood to truth doth not make truth to be leſs true, or deſtroy the certainty and evidence of it. Suppoſing the religions to be oppoſite, and that miracles are ſaid to be wrought in atteſtation of thoſe oppoſite religions, it may indeed be fairly concluded that they cannot be all true, but not that none of them is ſo. Our author himſelf ſeems to be apprehenſive, that this might be looked upon as a fallacious way of reaſoning. "This "argument," ſays he, "may appear very ſubtile and refined; but "is not in reality different from the reaſoning of a judge, who "ſuppoſes, that the credit of two witneſſes, maintaining a crime "againſt any one, is deſtroyed by the teſtimony of two others, "who affirm him to have been two hundred leagues diſtant at "the ſame inſtant when the crime is ſaid to have been committed*. This gentleman has here given us a moſt extraordinary ſpecimen how well qualified he would be to determine cauſes if

* Hume's Philoſophical Eſſays, p. 194.

he

he ſat in a court of judicature. If there came ſeveral witneſſes before him, and their teſtimony was oppoſite to one another, he would without farther examination reject them all at once, and make their oppoſition to one another to be alone a proof that they were all falſe, and none of them to be depended upon. But it hath been hitherto thought reaſonable, when teſtimonies are oppoſite, to weigh and compare thoſe teſtimonies, in order to form a proper judgment concerning them. In caſe of *alibi's*, which is the caſe the author here puts, the teſtimonies do not always deſtroy one another. A juſt and impartial judge will not immediately reject the teſtimonies on both ſides without examination, becauſe they contradict one another, which is the method our author ſeems here to recommend as reaſonable, but will carefully compare them, that he may find out on which ſide the truth lies, and which of the teſtimonies is moſt to be credited, and will give his judgment accordingly. This certainly is the courſe which right reaſon preſcribeth in all caſes, where there is an oppoſition of teſtimony, and which it is to be preſumed this gentleman himſelf would recommend in every caſe, but where the cauſe of religion is concerned. For here, notwithſtanding all his pretenſions to freedom of thinking, his prejudices are ſo ſtrong, that he is for proceeding by different weights and meaſures from what he and all mankind would judge reaſonable in every other inſtance. He hath ſhewed himſelf ſo little qualified to judge impartially in matters of this nature, that I believe *men of ſenſe*, to uſe his own phraſe, will lay very little ſtreſs on any judgment he ſhall think fit to pronounce in this cauſe.

The only part of Mr. Hume's *Eſſay on Miracles* which now remaineth to be conſidered, is that which relates to ſome particular accounts of miraculous facts, which he would have us believe are as well or better atteſted, than thoſe recorded in the Goſpels, and yet are to be rejected as falſe and incredible. The firſt inſtance he mentioneth is that of the Emperor Veſpaſian's curing a blind and a lame man at Alexandria, and which he affirms is one of the beſt atteſted miracles in all profane hiſtory. This has been urged by almoſt every deiſtical writer who hath treated of miracles: and how little it is to the purpoſe in the preſent controverſy hath been often ſhewn. Not to repeat what Mr. Adams hath well urged concerning it, it may be ſufficient to obſerve, that

that it appeareth from the accounts given us by the hiſtorians who mention it *, that the deſign of theſe miracles was to give weight to the authority of Veſpaſian, newly made Emperor by the great men and the army, and to make it be believed that his elevation to the imperial throne was approved by the gods. I believe every reaſonable man will be of opinion, that in any caſe of this kind there is great ground to ſuſpect artifice and management. And who would be ſo preſumptuous as to make too narrow a ſcrutiny into the truth of miracles, in which the intereſts of the great, and the authority of a mighty Emperor, were ſo nearly concerned? And if, as this writer obſerves from Tacitus, ſome who were preſent continued to relate theſe facts, even after Veſpaſian and his family were no longer in poſſeſſion of the empire; it doth not appear, that the perſons referred to were ſuch as had been in the ſecret of the management, which probably lay in few hands; or if they were, it is not to be wondered at that they ſhould afterwards be unwilling to own the part they had in this affair; eſpecially ſince no methods were made uſe of to oblige them to diſcover the fraud.

The next inſtance he produceth is the miracle pretended to have been wrought at Saragoſſa, and mentioned by Cardinal De Retz, who, by Mr. Hume's own account, did not believe it. But certainly a man muſt have his head very oddly turned, to attempt to draw a parallel between the miracles of our Saviour and his apoſtles, and miracles pretended to have been wrought in a country where the inquiſition is eſtabliſhed, where the influence and intereſts of the prieſts, the ſuperſtitions and prejudices of the people, and the authority of the civil magiſtrate, are all combined to ſupport the credit of thoſe miracles, and where it would be extremely dangerous to make a ſtrict inquiry into the truth of them; and even the expreſſing the leaſt doubt concerning them might expoſe a man to the moſt terrible of all evils and ſufferings.

But that which Mr. Hume ſeems to lay the greateſt ſtreſs upon, and on which he enlarges for ſome pages together, is, the miracles reported to have been wrought at the tomb of the Abbé de Paris. Having obſerved, that in the *Recueil des Miracles de*

* Tacit. Hiſt. lib. 4. verſus finem. Sueton. in Veſpaſ. cap. 8.

l'Abbé

l'Abbé de Paris, there is a parallel run between the miracles of our Saviour and thoſe of the Abbé, he pronounces, that "if the "inſpired writers were to be conſidered merely as human teſti- "mony, the French author is very moderate in his compariſon; "ſince he might with ſome appearance of reaſon pretend, that "the Janſeniſt miracles much ſurpaſs the others in credit and "authority*."

This has been of late a favourite topic with the deiſts. Great triumphs have been raiſed upon it, as if it were alone ſufficient to deſtroy the credit of the miraculous facts recorded in the New Teſtament. I ſhall therefore make ſome obſervations upon it, though in doing ſo I ſhall be obliged to take notice of ſeveral things which Mr. Adams hath already obſerved, in his judicious reflections upon this ſubject, in his anſwer to Mr. Hume's *Eſſay on Miracles*, from page 65 to page 78.

The account Mr. Hume pretends to give of this whole affair is very unfair and diſingenuous, and is abſolutely unworthy of any man that makes pretenſions to a free and impartial inquiry. He poſitively aſſerts, that the miraculous facts were ſo ſtrongly proved, that the Moliniſts or Jeſuits were never able diſtinctly to refute or detect them; and that they could not deny the truth of the facts, but aſcribed them to witchcraft and the devil. Yet certain it is, that the Jeſuits or Moliniſts did deny many of the facts to be true as the Janſeniſts related them; that they aſſerted them to be falſe, and plainly proved ſeveral of them to be ſo. Particularly the Archbiſhop of Sens diſtinctly inſiſted upon twenty-two of thoſe pretended miraculous facts, all which he charged as owing to falſehood and impoſture.

He farther obſerves, that twenty-two of the Curés or Rectors of Paris preſſed the Archbiſhop of Paris to examine thoſe miracles, and aſſerted them to be known to the whole world. But he knew, or might have known, that ſome of thoſe very miracles which thoſe gentlemen deſired might be particularly inquired into, and which they repreſented as undeniably true and certain, were afterwards examined, and the perjury of the principal witneſſes plainly detected†. And the Archbiſhop, who, he tells

* Hume's Philoſophical Eſſays, p. 196.

† See Mr. des Voeux's Critique Generale, p. 242, 243.

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us, wiſely forbore an inquiry, cauſed a public judicial inqueſt to be made, as Mr. Adams obſerves, and in an ordonnance of November 8, 1735, publiſhed the moſt convincing proofs, that the miracles ſo ſtrongly vouched by the Curés, were forged and counterfeited *.

Mr. Hume is pleaſed to obſerve, that "the Moliniſt party "tried to diſcredit thoſe miracles in one inſtance, that of Made-"moiſelle le Franc, but were not able to do it:" where he ſpeaks, as if this were the ſingle inſtance in which they tried to diſcredit thoſe miracles, which is far from being true. This indeed was taken particular notice of, becauſe it was the firſt hiſtory of a miraculous fact which the Janſeniſts thought fit to publiſh, with a pompous diſſertation prefixed. It was cried up as of ſuch unqueſtionable truth, that it could not be denied without doubting of the moſt certain facts: and yet the ſtory was proved to be falſe in the moſt material circumſtances, by forty witneſſes judicially examined upon oath. It was plainly proved, that ſhe was conſiderably better of her maladies before ſhe went to the tomb at all: that ſhe was no ſtronger when ſhe returned from the tomb than ſhe was when ſhe went to it: and that ſhe ſtill ſtood in need of remedies afterwards. Mr. Hume indeed takes upon him to declare, that the proceedings were the moſt irregular in the world, particularly in citing but a few of the Janſeniſt witneſſes, whom they tampered with: and then he adds, "beſides they were ſoon overwhelmed with a cloud of new wit-"neſſes, an hundred and twenty in number, who gave oath "for the miracles." He doth not ſay, they all gave oath for this particular miracle, but for the miracles: and indeed moſt of thoſe teſtimonies were very little to the purpoſe, and ſeemed to be deſigned rather for parade and ſhow than for proof; and nothing turned more to the diſadvantage of the Janſeniſts, and their endeavouring ſtill to maintain the credit of this miracle, after the falſehood of it had been ſo evidently detected: the more witneſſes they endeavoured to produce for this, the more they rendered themſelves ſuſpected in all the reſt. They alleged ſome want of formality in the proceedings, but were never able to diſprove the principal circumſtances of the facts alleged on the

* Adams's Eſſay, p. 71.

other

other ſide, and which were abſolutely inconſiſtent with the truth and reality of the miracle*.

Mr. Hume refers his reader to the *Recueil des Miracles de l'Abbé Paris*, in three volumes: but eſpecially to the famous book of Mr. de Montgeron, a counſellor or judge of the parliament of Paris, and which was dedicated to the French King. But if he had read on both ſides, or had thought fit to lay the matter fairly before his reader, he might have informed him, that theſe books have been ſolidly anſwered by Mr. Des Voeux, a very ingenious and judicious author, who had himſelf been bred up among the Janſeniſts, and was at Paris part of the time that this ſcene was carrying on. See his *Lettres ſur les Miracles*, publiſhed in 1735, and his *Critique Générale du Livre de Mr. de Montgeron*, in 1741. See alſo what relates to this ſubject in the 19th and 20th tomes of the *Bibliotheque Raiſonnée*.

There never was perhaps a book written with a greater air of aſſurance and confidence, than that of Mr. de Montgeron. He intitles it, *The Truth of the Miracles wrought by the Interceſſion of M. de Paris and other Appellants, demonſtrated againſt M. the Archbiſhop of Sens*. It was natural therefore to expect, that he would have attempted to juſtify all thoſe miracles which that prelate had attacked. But of twenty-two which are diſtinctly inſiſted upon by the Archbiſhop, there are ſeventeen which Mr. de Montgeron does not meddle with. He hath paſſed by thoſe of them againſt which the ſtrongeſt charges of falſehood and impoſture lay. Five of the miracles attacked by the Archbiſhop, he takes pains to juſtify; to which he has added four more, which that prelate had not diſtinctly conſidered. Mr. Des Voeux, who has examined this work of Mr. de Montgeron with great care and judgment, hath plainly ſhewn, that there are every-where to be diſcovered in it marks of the ſtrongeſt prepoſſeſſion†. Carried away by the power of his prejudices, and by his affection to the Janſeniſt cauſe, to which he was greatly attached, he has in ſeveral inſtances diſguiſed and miſrepreſented facts in a man-

* This whole matter is ſet in a clear light in Mr. Des Voeux's Diſſertation ſur les Miracles, &c. p. 46. 49. and in his Critique Generale, p. 204. 231, 232.

† The character of Mr. de Montgeron is well repreſented by Mr. Adams, in his Anſwer to Hume, p. 74, 75.

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ner which cannot be excuſed or vindicated. The laſt-mentioned author has charged him with faults, not merely of inadvertency, but with direct falſifications deſigned to impoſe upon the public. See the ſixth letter of his *Critique Générale*, page 208, *et ſeq.* Mr. Hume has taken care not to give his reader the leaſt hint of any thing of this nature.

The remarks which have been now made may help us to judge of Mr. Hume's conduct in his management of this ſubject.

I ſhall now proceed to make ſome obſervations upon the remarkable differences there are between the miracles recorded in the goſpels, and thoſe aſcribed to the Abbé de Paris; by conſidering which it will appear, that no argument can be juſtly drawn from the latter to diſcredit the former, or to invalidate the proofs produced for them.

I. One obſervation of no ſmall weight is this: at the time when the miracles of the Abbé de Paris firſt appeared, there was a ſtrong and numerous party in France, and which was under the conduct of very able and learned men, who were ſtrongly prepoſſeſſed in favour of that cauſe which thoſe miracles ſeemed to be intended to ſupport: and it might naturally be expected, that theſe would uſe all their intereſt and influence for maintaining and ſpreading the credit of them among the people. And ſo it actually happened. The firſt rumours of theſe miracles were eagerly laid hold on; and they were cried up as real and certain miracles, and as giving a clear deciſion of Heaven on the ſide of the appellants, even before there was any regular proof ſo much as pretended to be given for them *. To which it may be added, that the beginning of this whole affair was at a very promiſing conjuncture, *viz.* when the Cardinal de Noailles was archbiſhop of Paris; who, whatever may be ſaid of his capacity and integrity, which Mr. Hume highly extols, was well known to be greatly inclined to favour the cauſe of the appellants. It was therefore a ſituation of things very favourable to the credit of thoſe miracles, that they firſt appeared under his adminiſtration, and were tried before his officials; and though the ſucceeding archbiſhop was no friend to the Janſeniſts, yet when once the credit of thoſe miracles was in ſome meaſure eſtabliſhed, and

* See Critique Generale, let. vi.

they had got the popular vogue on their ſide, the affair was more eaſily carried on. But at the firſt appearance of Chriſtianity, the circumſtances of things were entirely different. There were indeed parties among the Jews, the moſt powerful of which were the Phariſees and Sadducees, beſides the prieſts and rulers of the Jews, and the Sanhedrim, or great council of the nation: but not one of theſe afforded the leaſt countenance to the firſt witneſſes and publiſhers of the Chriſtian religion. Our Lord, far from addicting himſelf to any party, freely declared againſt what was amiſs in every one of them: he oppoſed the diſtinguiſhing tenets of the Sadducees; the traditions, ſuperſtitions, and hypocriſy of the Phariſees, and the prejudices of the vulgar. Chriſtianity proceeded upon a principle directly contrary to that, in which all parties among the Jews were agreed, *viz.* upon the doctrine of a ſpiritual kingdom, and a ſuffering Meſſiah: and accordingly all the different ſects and parties, all the powers civil and eccleſiaſtical, united their intereſts and endeavours to oppoſe and ſuppreſs it. Whatever ſuſpicion therefore might be entertained with regard to the miracles ſaid to have been wrought at the tomb of the Abbé de Paris, which had a ſtrong party from the beginning prepared to receive and ſupport them, no ſuch ſuſpicion can reaſonably be admitted as to the truth and reality of the extraordinary facts whereby Chriſtianity was atteſted, which, as the caſe was circumſtanced, could ſcarce poſſibly have made their way in the manner they did, or have eſcaped detection, if they had not been true.

II. Another conſideration, which ſhews a remarkable difference between the miracles recorded to have been wrought by our Saviour and his apoſtles, and thoſe aſcribed to the Abbé de Paris, is this: That the former carry plain characters of a divine interpoſition, and a ſupernatural power; and the latter, even taking their own account of them, do not appear to be evidently miraculous, as they may be accounted for without ſuppoſing any thing properly ſupernatural in the caſe. Our Lord Jeſus Chriſt not only healed all manner of diſeaſes, but he raiſed the dead: he commanded the winds and the ſeas, and they obeyed him: he ſearched the hearts, and knew the thoughts of men: he gave many expreſs and circumſtantial predictions of future contingencies, both relating to his own ſufferings and death, and to his conſequent

reſurrection

reſurrection and exaltation, and relating to the calamities that ſhould come upon the Jews, the deſtruction of Jeruſalem and the temple, and the wonderful propagation and eſtabliſhment of his church and kingdom in the world, which it was impoſſible for any man, judging by the rules of human probability, to foreſee: he not only performed the moſt wonderful works himſelf, but he imparted the ſame miraculous power to his diſciples, and poured forth upon them the extraordinary gifts of the Holy Ghoſt, as he had promiſed and foretold; gifts of the moſt admirable nature, which were never paralleled before or ſince, and which were peculiarly fitted for ſpreading and propagating the Chriſtian religion. With regard to theſe, and other things which might be mentioned, no man has ever pretended to draw a compariſon between the miracles aſcribed to the Abbé de Paris and thoſe of our Saviour: and accordingly one of the moſt zealous and able advocates for the former, M. Le Gros, expreſsly acknowledgeth, that there is *an infinite difference between them*, and declares, that he *will never forget that difference*. The only inſtance in which a parallel is pretended to be drawn, is with regard to miraculous cures, which, alone conſidered, are the moſt uncertain and equivocal of all miracles. Diſeaſes have often been ſurpriſingly cured, without any thing that can be properly called miraculous in the caſe. Wonderful has been the effect of medicines adminiſtered in certain circumſtances: and ſome maladies, after having long reſiſted all the art and power of remedies, have gone off of themſelves by the force of nature, or by ſome ſurpriſing and unexpected turn, in a manner that cannot be diſtinctly explained. Yet it may be obſerved, that there were ſeveral circumſtances attending the miraculous cures wrought by our Saviour and his apoſtles, which plainly ſhewed them to be divine. The cures were wrought in an inſtant, by a commanding word. The blind, the lame, thoſe that laboured under the moſt obſtinate and inveterate diſeaſes, found themſelves immediately reſtored at once with an Almighty facility. If there had been only a few inſtances of this kind, it might poſſibly have been attributed to ſome odd accident, or hidden cauſe, which could not be accounted for: but the inſtances of ſuch complete and inſtantaneous cures wrought by our Saviour were very numerous. They extended to all manner of diſeaſes, and to all perſons without ex-

ception who applied to him: yea, he cured ſome that did not apply to him, who did not know him, or who were his enemies, and had no expectation of a cure, in which caſes it could not be pretended that imagination had any ſhare. In all theſe reſpects, there was a remarkable difference between the miraculous cures wrought by our Saviour, and thoſe pretended to have been wrought at the tomb of the Abbé de Paris. Several of their moſt boaſted cures, and which were pretended to have been ſudden and perfected at once, appear from their own accounts to have been carried on by ſlow degrees, and therefore might have been brought about in a natural way. Some of theſe cures were days, weeks, and even months, before they were perfected. One nine days devotion followed another, and they were ſuffered to languiſh, and continue praying and ſupplicating for a conſiderable time together; and if the cure happened, and the diſtemper came to a criſis during the courſe of their long attendance, and whilſt they were continuing their devotions, this paſſed for a miraculous cure, though it might well be done without any miracle at all: eſpecially as ſeveral of thoſe perſons continued to be taking remedies, even whilſt they were attending at the tomb. It is manifeſt from the relations publiſhed by themſelves, that with regard to ſeveral of thoſe who were pretended to be miraculouſly cured, their maladies had already begun to abate, and they had found conſiderable eaſe and relief in a natural way before they came to the tomb at all: and ſome of them ſeem by the force of their imagination to have believed themſelves cured, when they were not ſo, or to have taken a temporary relief for an abſolute cure. Several of the cures, the accounts of which were publiſhed with great pomp, could not with any propriety be ſaid to have been perfected at all; ſince the perſons ſaid to have been cured ſtill continued infirm, and had returns of their former diſorders. This can ſcarce be ſuppoſed, if the cures had been really miraculous, and owing to an extraordinary exertion of the power of God, who would not have left his own work imperfect. See all theſe things fully proved by many inſtances, in M. des Voeux's *Lettres ſur les Miracles;* particularly in the fifth of theſe letters.

To all which it may be added, that of the vaſt numbers who came to the tomb to be cured, and who had recourſe to the Abbé's interceſſion, there were but few on whom the cures were wrought,

wrought, in comparison of those who found no benefit at all, though they applied to him with the utmost devotion, and continued to do so for a long time together: and indeed, considering how many there were that applied for help and cure, and how much they were prepossessed with the notions countenanced in the Romish church, of the power of departed saints, of the prevalency of their intercession, and the efficacy of their relics, and to what a height their imagination was raised by their prejudices in favour of the appellants, by the high opinion they had of the Abbé's extraordinary sanctity, by the rumours of miracles daily spread and propagated, and by the vast crowds which attended at the tomb, it would have been really a wonder, if, amongst the multitudes that came for cure, there had not been several who found themselves greatly relieved. The advocates for the miracles mightily extol the extraordinary faith and confidence the sick persons had in the intercession of the blessed Deacon, as they call him: and the force of their imagination, when carried to so extraordinary a pitch, might in some particular cases produce great effects. Many wonderful instances to this purpose have been observed and recorded by the ablest physicians, by which it appears what a mighty influence imagination, accompanied with strong passions, hath often had upon human bodies, especially in the cure of diseases: it hath often done more in a short time this way, than a long course of medicines have been able to accomplish. It is not therefore to be much wondered at, that as the case was circumstanced, amidst such a multitude of persons, some surprizing cures were wrought: but it could not be expected that the effect would be constant and uniform. If it answered in some instances, it would fail in many more: and accordingly so it was with regard to these pretended miraculous cures. And if this had been the case in the extraordinary cures wrought by our Saviour, there would have been ground of suspicion, that what some have alleged might possibly have been true, that his miracles owed their force, not to any supernatural energy, but to the power of imagination. But taking these miracles as they are recorded in the gospels, it is manifest, that there can be no just ground for such a pretence. They exhibit evident proofs of a divine interposition, which cannot be said of those reported to have been wrought at the Abbé's tomb. M. de Mongeron,

in his book dedicated to the King, publiſhed an account of eight or ninecures; and it is to be ſuppoſed, that he fixed upon thoſe which he thought had the appearance of being moſt ſignally miraculous: and yet the very firſt of thoſe miracles, *viz.* that affirmed to have been wrought upon Don Alphonſo de Palacio, appeareth plainly, by taking the whole of the relation as M. Montgeron himſelf hath given it, to have had nothing in it properly miraculous, as Mr. Adams hath clearly ſhewn*. And with regard both to that and the other miracles ſo pompouſly diſplayed by M. de Montgeron, M. Des Voeux has very ingeniouſly and judiciouſly, after a diſtinct examination of each of them, made it appear, that they might have been wrought without ſuppoſing any miraculous or ſupernatural interpoſition at all. See the laſt letter of his *Critique Générale*.

III. Another conſideration, which ſhews the great difference there is between the miracles wrought at the firſt eſtabliſhment of Chriſtianity, and thoſe ſaid to have been wrought at the tomb of the Abbé de Paris, and that no argument can reaſonably be brought from the latter to the prejudice of the former, is taken from the many ſuſpicious circumſtances attending the latter, from which the former were entirely free. Chriſt's miracles were wrought, in a grave and decent, in a great but ſimple manner, becoming one ſent of God, without any abſurd or ridiculous ceremonies, or ſuperſtitious obſervances. But the miracles of the Abbé de Paris were attended with circumſtances that had all the marks of ſuperſtition, and which ſeemed deſigned and fitted to ſtrike the imagination. The earth of his tomb was often made uſe of, or the waters of the well of his houſe. The nine days devotion was conſtantly uſed, and frequently repeated again and again by the ſame perſons; a ceremony derived originally from the pagans, and which hath been condemned as ſuperſtitious by ſome eminent divines of the Romiſh church†. Another circumſtance to be obſerved, with relation to Chriſt's miracles, is, that, as hath been already hinted, they were not only perfected at once, but the perſons found themſelves healed and reſtored without trouble or difficulty. But in the caſe of the

* Adams's Eſſay, in Anſwer to Hume, p. 76, 77.

† Lettres ſur les Miracles, p. 258, 259. 336, 337.

cures

cures affirmed to have been wrought at the Abbé's tomb, it appeareth from their own accounts, not only that they were gradual and ſlow, but that the perſons on whom theſe cures were wrought, frequently ſuffered the moſt grievous and exceſſive pains and torments, and which they themſelves repreſent to have been greater than ever they had felt before, or were able to expreſs; and theſe pains often continued for ſeveral days together in the utmoſt extremity*. To which may be added, the violent agitations and convulſions, which became ſo uſual on theſe occaſions, that they came at length to be regarded as ſymptoms of the miraculous cures; though they could not be properly regarded in this view, ſince many of thoſe who had thoſe convulſions found no relief in their maladies, and even grew worſe than before. They were frequently attended with ſtrange contortions, ſometimes frightful, ſometimes ridiculous, and ſometimes inconſiſtent with the rules of modeſty and decency†. And accordingly they have been condemned by ſome of the moſt eminent Janſeniſt divines. In 1735 there was publiſhed at Paris a remarkable piece, intitled, *Conſultation ſur les Convulſions*, ſigned by thirty appellant doctors, men of great reputation among the Janſeniſts for learning, judgment, and probity; the greater part of whom had at firſt entertained favourable thoughts of thoſe convulſions; and ſome of them had publicly declared them to be the work of God. But now they pronounced them to be unworthy of God, of his infinite majeſty, wiſdom, and goodneſs: They declared that it was a folly, a fanaticiſm, a ſcandal, and in one word, a blaſphemy againſt God, to attribute to him theſe

* Lettres ſur les Miracles, p. 339, & ſeq.

† Some of thoſe that were ſeized with theſe convulſions, or pretended to be ſo, were guilty of the moſt extravagant follies. They pretended to prophecy, and uttered ſeveral predictions, which the event ſoon proved to be falſe. One of them went ſo far as to foretel, that the church-yard of St. Medard, which had been ſhut up by the King's order, ſhould be opened, and that M. de Paris ſhould appear in the church, in the preſence of great numbers of people, on the firſt of May following. See this and other remarkable things relating to theſe convulſions, in M. Vernet's Traite de la Verite de la Religion Chretienne, ſect. 7. chap. 22, 23. And there cannot be a greater proof of the power of M. de Montgeron's prejudices, than that in the laſt edition of his book, in three volumes 4to. he has particularly applied himſelf to ſupport and juſtify theſe convulſions.

operations; and did not ſcruple to intimate, that they rendered the miraculous cures, to which they were pretended to be annexed, ſuſpected. Theſe doctors, who were called the *Conſultants*, condemned all the convulſions in general. Others of the Janſeniſt divines, whom M. de Montgeron has diſtinguiſhed by the title of the *Antiſecouriſtes*, and whom he acknowledges to be among the moſt zealous appellants, and to be perſons of great merit and eminence, though they did not condemn all the convulſions, yet paſſed a very ſevere cenſure upon thoſe of them which that gentleman looks upon to be the moſt extraordinary and miraculous of all. And with regard to theſe convulſions in general, it may be obſerved, that, by the acknowledgment of the moſt ſkilful phyſicians, nervous affections have frequently produced ſtrange ſymptoms; that they are often of a catching contagious nature, and eaſily communicated; and that they may be counterfeited by art. Many of thoſe that were ſeized by M. Heraut, the Lieutenant of Police, acknowledged to him that they had counterfeited convulſions: in conſequence of which there was an ordonnance publiſhed by the King, January 27, 1732, for ſearching out and apprehending thoſe impoſtors. And yet Mr. Hume has thought proper to repreſent it, as if M. Heraut, though he had full power to ſeize and examine the *witneſſes* and *ſubjects* of theſe miracles, *could never reach any thing ſatisfactory againſt them.*

Theſe muſt be owned to be circumſtances, which adminiſter juſt grounds of ſuſpicion, and which make a wide difference between the miracles pretended to have been wrought at the tomb of the Abbé de Paris, and thoſe that were performed by our Saviour, and by the apoſtles in his name.

IV. The next obſervation I ſhall make is this: that ſeveral of the miracles aſcribed to the Abbé, and which were pretended to be proved by many witneſſes, were afterwards clearly convicted of falſehood and impoſture; which brings a great diſcredit upon all the reſt: whereas nothing of this kind can be alleged againſt the miracles by which Chriſtianity was atteſted. The affair of Anne le Franc, of which ſome account was given above, ſhews, as M. Des Voeux juſtly obſerves, how little dependence is to be had upon informations in this cauſe directed by Janſeniſts. But this is not the only inſtance of this kind. They had publiſhed, that

that La Dalmaix had been miraculouſly cured by the Abbe's interceſſion; and this was proved by a letter pretended to have been written by herſelf. And yet this pretended miraculous cure was afterwards denied by the perſon herſelf, by her mother, and all her ſiſters: and by a ſentence of a court of judicature of May 17, 1737, a perſon was declared to be convicted of having forged that, and ſome other letters, under the name of Dalmaix*. The Sieur le Doux openly retracted the relation of a miracle ſaid to have been wrought upon himſelf. M. Des Voeux gives ſeveral other inſtances of falſe miracles, publiſhed by the Janſeniſts, and afterwards acknowledged to be ſo†. Jean Nivet was repreſented, by deciſive informations, as cured of his deafneſs, and yet it is certain that he was deaf after, as well as before. The record of the informations made by Mr. Thomaſſin is full of contradictions, which diſcover the falſehood and perjury of the principal actreſs, and of the only witneſs of the miracle, as the Archbiſhop of Sens has well proved: though many of theſe proofs are paſſed over in ſilence by M. le Gros, who undertook to anſwer him‡. Some of the witneſſes and perſons concerned withdrew, to eſcape the ſearch that was made for them, and to ſhun the examination and inquiry which the king had ordered; and others, who had atteſted that they were cured by the interceſſion of the Abbé de Paris, afterwards retracted it. The certificates themſelves, on which ſo great a ſtreſs is laid, tend in many inſtances to increaſe the ſuſpicion againſt thoſe facts, which they were deſigned to confirm. The very number of thoſe certificates, many of which are nothing at all to the purpoſe, and ſerve only for ſhew, are plain proofs of art and deſign. The manner of drawing up thoſe certificates, and the relations of the miracles, and the ſtyle and form of expreſſion, ſhew, that the perſons in whoſe names they are drawn had the aſſiſtance of perſons of a capacity much ſuperior to their own. Long pieces, in a correct ſtyle, and in perfect good order, were publiſhed under the name of mean and illiterate perſons. M. le Gros owns, that the relation of Genevieve Colin was reformed

* Vernet ubi ſupra, cap. xxi.

† Lettres ſur les Miracles, p. 171, et ſeq. Critique Generale, p. 204, &c. 233, 234.

‡ Lettres ſur les Miracles, p. 242, 243.

as to the ſtyle, by a perſon whom ſhe deſired to do it. Thus they had it in their power, under pretence of reforming, to alter it, and got the ſimple perſon to ſign the whole. Five witneſſes in the caſe of Anne le Franc depoſe, that their certificates left with the notary were altered, falſified, and embelliſhed with divers circumſtances. Many of the relations which were at firſt publiſhed, and were not thought full enough, were afterwards ſuppreſſed, and do not appear in M. de Montgeron's collection; and others more ample were ſubſtituted in their ſtead, and embelliſhed with many ſtriking circumſtances, which were omitted in the firſt relation. Many of the witneſſes in their depoſitions carry it farther than, according to their own account, they could have any certain knowledge. Some of them appear to have been ſurprized into their teſtimonies by falſe or imperfect repreſentations; and artifices were employed to procure certificates from phyſicians, without bringing the caſe fully before them, or ſuffering them fairly to examine it.

To all which it may be added, that there is great reaſon to ſuſpect, that many poor people feigned maladies, and pretended to be cured, on purpoſe to procure the gifts and benefactions of others; which many of them did to good advantage. It is well known, and has been often proved, that in the Romiſh church there have been inſtances of perſons, who made a trade of feigning maladies, and pretending to be miraculouſly cured. Such a one was Catharine de Prés, who was afterwards convicted by her own confeſſion; of which Father Le Brun hath given a particular account, *Hiſt. Crit. des Prat. Superſtit.* liv. ii. cap. 4. who hath alſo detected ſeveral other falſe miracles which had been believed by numbers of that church. And may we not reaſonably ſuſpect the fame of many poor people who came to the tomb of the Abbé de Paris? See all theſe things ſhewn in M. Des Voeux's *Lettres ſur les Miracles*, Letter V, VI. and eſpecially in Letters VII. and VIII. of his *Critique Générale*, where he particularly examineth every one of the miracles produced by M. de Montgeron. It is his obſervation, that the more carefully we conſider thoſe relations, and compare them with the pieces that are deſigned to juſtify them, the more plainly the falſehood of them appeareth. And accordingly he hath found out not merely a ſingle contradiction, but numerous contradictions,

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in the relations of the ſeveral miracles, compared with the certificates, and the pieces produced in juſtification of them. And therefore he aſks with good reaſon, what becomes of demonſtrations built on ſuch relations and ſuch certificates? He very properly obſerves, that the falſity even of a ſmall number of facts, which are pretended to be proved by certificates, that were collected by thoſe who took pains to verify the miracles, are ſufficient to diſcredit all others founded on ſuch certificates.

If the ſame things could have been juſtly objected againſt the miracles recorded in the New Teſtament, Chriſtianity, conſidering the other diſadvantages it laboured under, could never have been eſtabliſhed.* But the caſe with regard to theſe miracles was very different. They were not indeed proved by certificates, which may be procured by art and management. The firſt publiſhers of the Chriſtian religion did not go about to collect evidences and teſtimonies; nor was there any need of their doing ſo in facts that were publicly known, and the reality of which their enemies themſelves were not able to deny. They acted with greater ſimplicity, and with an open confidence of truth. Their narrations are plain and artleſs; nor do they take pains to prepoſſeſs or influence the reader, either by artful inſinuations, or too *violent aſſertions*; which our author mentions as a ſuſpicious circumſtance. Never were any of their enemies able to convict them of falſehood. Far from ever denying the facts they had witneſſed, or withdrawing for fear of having thoſe facts inquired into, as ſeveral did in the other caſe, they openly avowed thoſe facts before the public tribunals, and before perſons of the higheſt authority: they never varied in their teſtimony, but perſiſted in it with an unfainting conſtancy, and ſealed it with their blood. And it gives no ſmall weight to their teſtimony, that they witneſſed for facts, which were deſigned to confirm a ſcheme of religion contrary to their own moſt rooted prejudices. Nor can it be alleged, that they were themſelves divided about the reality and divinity of the miracles wrought by Chriſt and his apoſtles, much leſs that they rejected and condemned many of them as fooliſh, ſcandalous, and injurious to the Divine Majeſty; which was the cenſure paſſed upon ſome of the extraordinary facts relating to the Abbé de Paris, by the moſt eminent Janſeniſt divines.

Finally,

Finally, the laſt obſervation I ſhall make is this: that the miracles of our Saviour and his apoſtles appear to have been wrought for an end worthy of the divine wiſdom and goodneſs. The declared deſign of them was to give an atteſtation to the divine miſſion of the moſt excellent perſon that ever appeared in the world, and to confirm the beſt ſcheme of religion that was ever publiſhed, the moſt manifeſtly conducive to the glory of God, and to the ſalvation of mankind. Here was an end worthy of God, and for which it was fit for him to interpoſe in the moſt extraordinary manner. Accordingly this religion, thus atteſted and confirmed, was eſtabliſhed in the world, and ſoon triumphed over all oppoſition. All the power of the adverſary, civil or ſacerdotal, could not put a ſtop to its progreſs, or to the wonderful works done in confirmation of it. The effects which followed, conſidering the amazing difficulties it had to ſtruggle with, and the ſeeming weakneſs and meanneſs of the inſtruments made uſe of to propagate it, proved the reality of thoſe miracles, and that the whole was carried on by a divine power. But if we turn our views on the other hand to the miracles pretended to have been wrought at the tomb of the Abbé de Paris, it doth not appear that they anſwered any valuable end. There has indeed been an end found out for them, *viz.* to give a teſtimony from heaven to the cauſe of the appellants. But we may juſtly conclude from the wiſdom of God, that in that caſe it would have been ſo ordered, as to make it evident that this was the intention of them, and that he would have taken care that no oppoſition from men ſhould prevail, to defeat the deſign for which he interpoſed in ſo extraordinary a manner. But this was far from being the caſe. Mr. Hume indeed tells us, that "no Janſeniſt "was ever at a loſs to account for the ceſſation of the miracles, "when the church-yard was ſhut up by the king's edict. 'Twas "the touch of the tomb which operated thoſe extraordinary ef-"fects, and when no one could approach the tomb, no effect "could be expected*." But ſuppoſing that the deſign of thoſe extraordinary divine interpoſitions was to give a teſtimony from heaven to the cauſe of the appellants, it is abſurd to imagine, that it would have been in the power of an earthly prince, by

* Hume's Philoſophical Eſſays, p. 208.

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ſhutting up the tomb, to put a ſtop to the courſe of the miraculous operations, and to render the deſign of God of none effect *. It ſtrengthens this, when it is farther conſidered, that the whole affair of theſe pretended miracles turned in the iſſue rather to the diſadvantage of the cauſe it was deſigned to confirm. It hath been already obſerved, that ſome of the moſt eminent among the appellant doctors, and who were moſt zealouſly attached to that cauſe, were greatly ſcandalized at ſeveral of thoſe miracles, and eſpecially at the extraordinary convulſions which generally attended them. The cenſures they paſſed upon them gave occaſion to bitter contentions, and mutual ſevere reproaches and accuſations. Some of the Janſeniſt writers themſelves complain, that whereas before there was an entire and perfect union and harmony among them, as if they had been all of one heart and ſoul, there have been ſince that time cruel diviſions and animoſities, ſo that thoſe who were friends before became irreconcileable enemies †. And can it be imagined, that God would execute his deſigns in ſo imperfect a manner? that he would exert his own divine power to give teſtimony to that cauſe, and yet do it in ſuch a way as to weaken that cauſe inſtead of ſupporting it, to raiſe prejudices againſt it in the minds of enemies, inſtead of gaining them, and to divide and offend the friends of it, inſtead of confirming and uniting them? Upon the whole, with regard to the atteſtations given to Chriſtianity, all was wiſe, conſiſtent, worthy of God, and ſuited to the end for which it was deſigned. But the other is a broken, incoherent ſcheme, which cannot be reconciled to itſelf, nor made to conſiſt with the wiſdom and harmony of the divine proceedings. The former therefore is highly credible, though the latter is not ſo.

The ſeveral conſiderations which have been mentioned do each of them ſingly, much more all of them together, ſhew ſuch ſignal differences between the miracles recorded in the goſpels and thoſe aſcribed to the Abbé de Paris, that it muſt argue a peculiar

* M. de Montgeron indeed will not allow that the miraculous operations ceaſed at the ſhutting up of the tomb; but by the miraculous operations he principally underſtands the convulſions, which continued ſtill to be carried on; but which many of the principal Janſeniſts were far from looking upon as tokens of a divine interpoſition.

† Crit. Gener. lettre v. p. 159, & ſeq.

degree

degree of confidence to pretend to run a parallel between the one and the other, much more to affirm, as Mr. Hume has done, that the latter *much furpaſs* the former in *credit and authority*. This only ſhews how gladly theſe gentlemen would lay hold on any pretence to invalidate the evidences of Chriſtianity. Thus, Mr. Chubb, in a diſcourſe he publiſhed on miracles, in which he pretends impartially to repreſent the reaſonings on both ſides, produced with great pomp a pretended miracle wrought in the Cevennes in 1709, and repreſented it as of equal credit with thoſe of the goſpel. M. le Moyne, in his anſwer to him, hath evinced the falſehood of that ſtory in a manner that admits of no reply*: and yet it is not improbable, that ſome future deiſt may ſee fit ſome time or other to revive that ſtory, and oppoſe it to the miracles recorded in the New Teſtament.

Mr. Hume concludes his Eſſay with applauding his own performance, and is the better pleaſed with the *way of reaſoning* he has made uſe of, as he thinks, "it may ſerve to confound thoſe "dangerous friends, or diſguiſed enemies to the Chriſtian reli-"gion, who have undertaken to defend it by the principles of "human reaſon. Our moſt holy religion," ſaith he, "is founded "on faith, not on reaſon†: and it is a ſure method of expoſing "it,

* Le Moyne on Miracles, p. 422, &c.

† This author, who takes care to make the principles of his philoſophy ſubſervient to his deſigns againſt religion, in the fifth of his Philoſophical Eſſays, where he undertakes to treat of the nature of belief, gives ſuch an account of it as ſeems to exclude reaſon from any ſhare in it at all. He makes the difference between *faith* and *fiction* to conſiſt wholly in ſome ſentiment or feeling, which is annexed to the former, not to the latter: That the ſentiment of belief is nothing but the conception of an object more lively and forcible, more intenſe and ſteady than what attends the mere fiction of the imagination: and that this manner of conception ariſes from the cuſtomary conjunction of the object with ſomething preſent to the memory or ſenſes. See his Philoſophical Eſſays, p. 80—84. This gentleman is here, as in many other places, ſufficiently obſcure, nor is it eaſy to form a diſtinct notion of what he intends. But his deſign ſeems to be to exclude reaſon or the underſtanding from having any thing to do with belief, as if reaſon never had any influence in producing, directing, or regulating it; which is to open a wide door to enthuſiaſm. But this is contrary to what we may all obſerve, and frequently experience. We in ſeveral caſes clearly perceive, that we have reaſon to regard ſome things as fictitious, and others as true and real. And the reaſons which ſhew the difference between a fiction and a reality

"it, to put it to such a trial, as it is by no means fitted to endure." And he calls those, who undertake to defend religion by reason, *pretended Christians**. Such a mean and ungenerous sneer is below animadversion: all that can be gathered from it is, that these gentlemen are very uneasy at the attempts which have been made to defend Christianity in a way of reason and argument. They, it seems, are mightily concerned for *the preservation* of our holy faith, and in their great friendship for that cause would give it up as indefensible. And if the best way of befriending the Christian religion be to endeavour to subvert the evidences by which it is established, our author hath taken effectual care to convince the world of his friendly intentions towards it. As to the brief hints he hath given towards the end of his Essay against the Mosaic history, and the miracles recorded there, I shall not here take any notice of them, both because Mr. Adams hath clearly and succinctly obviated them, in his answer to that Essay, p. 88—94, and because I shall have occasion to resume this subject, when I come to make observations on Lord Bolingbroke's *Posthumous Works*, who hath with great virulence and bitterness used his utmost efforts to expose the Mosaic writings.

reality shew, that we ought in reason to believe the one and not the other: and so reason may go before the sentiment of belief, and lay a just foundation for it, and be instrumental to produce it. And in this case the belief may be said to be strictly rational.

* Hume's Philosophical Essays, p. 204, 205.

LETTER XX.

Additional Obſervations relating to Mr. Hume—A Tranſcript of an ingenious Paper, containing an Examination of Mr. Hume's Arguments in his Eſſay on Miracles—*Obſervations upon it—The Evidence of Matters of Fact may be ſo circumſtanced as to produce a full Aſſurance—Mr. Hume artfully confounds the Evidence of paſt Facts with the Probability of the future—We may be certain of a Matter of Fact after it hath happened, though it might before-hand ſeem very improbable that it would happen—Where full Evidence is given of a Fact, there muſt not always be a Deduction made on the Account of its being unuſual and extraordinary—There is ſtrong and poſitive Evidence of the Miracles wrought in Atteſtation of Chriſtianity, and no Evidence againſt them—The miraculous Nature of the Facts no Proof that the Facts were not done—A Summary of Mr. Hume's Argument againſt the Evidence of Miracles—The Weakneſs of it ſhewn—Conſidering the vaſt Importance of Religion to our Happineſs, the bare Poſſibility of its being true ſhould be ſufficient to engage our Compliance.*

SIR,

THE four preceding letters comprehend all the obſervations that were made upon Mr. Hume in the ſecond volume of the *View of the Deiſtical Writers*, 8vo. edit. But ſoon after that volume was publiſhed, I received a letter from a gentleman of ſenſe and learning, which particularly relates to that part of it which was deſigned in anſwer to Mr. Hume. He was pleaſed to ſay it gave him *uncommon ſatisfaction*, and at the ſame time ſent me a paper which he ſeemed to be very well pleaſed with, that had been drawn up by a young gentleman, then lately dead. It was deſigned as a confutation of Mr. Hume upon his own principles, which he thought had not been ſufficiently attended to in the anſwers that had been made to that writer; and he allowed me, if I ſhould be of opinion that any thing in it might be ſerviceable to a farther confutation of Mr. Hume, to make uſe

of

of his ſentiments either by way of note or appendix, as I ſhould judge moſt convenient. I returned an anſwer, in a letter which I ſhall here inſert, as it containeth ſome reflections that may be of advantage in relation to the controverſy with Mr. Hume: but firſt it will be proper to lay before the reader the paper itſelf here referred to, which is conciſely drawn, and runs thus:

AN EXAMINATION OF MR. HUME's ARGUMENTS IN HIS *ESSAY ON MIRACLES.*

THE objects of human underſtanding may be diſtinguiſhed either into propoſitions aſſerting the relation between general ideas, or matters of fact.

In the former kind, we can arrive at certainty, by means of a faculty in our ſouls, which perceives this relation either inſtantly or intimately, which is called Intuition, or elſe by intermediate ideas, which is called Demonſtration.

But we can only form a judgment of the latter by experience. No reaſoning *a priori* will diſcover to us, that water will ſuffocate, or the fire conſume us, or that the loadſtone will attract ſteel; and therefore no judgment can be made concerning the truth or falſehood of matters of fact, but what is conſtantly regulated by cuſtom and experience, and can therefore never go higher than probability.

When we have frequently obſerved a particular event to happen in certain circumſtances, the mind naturally makes an induction, that it will happen again in the ſame circumſtances. When this obſervation has been long, conſtant, and uninterrupted, there our belief that it will happen again approaches infinitely near to certainty. Thus no man has the leaſt doubt of the ſun's riſing to-morrow, or that the tide will ebb and flow at its accuſtomed periods: but where our obſervations are broke in upon by frequent interruptions and exceptions to the contrary, then we expect ſuch an event with the leaſt degree of aſſurance: and in all intermediate caſes, our expectations are always in proportion to the conſtancy and regularity of the experience.

This method of reaſoning is not connected by any medium or chain of ſteps, but is plainly to be obſerved in all animate beings,

brutes as well as men*. And it would be as abſurd to aſk a reaſon, why we expect to happen again, that which has regularly come to paſs a great many times before, as it is to inquire, why the mind perceives a relation between certain ideas.

They are both diſtinct faculties of the ſoul: and as it has been authorized by ſome writers of diſtinction, to give the denomination of ſenſe to the internal as well as external perceptions, the one may be called the *ſpeculative*, and the other the *probable ſenſe*.

From this laſt-mentioned principle Mr. Hume has deduced an argument to ſhew, that there is great improbability againſt the belief of any miraculous fact, how well ſoever atteſted: and as religion may ſeem to be greatly affected by this concluſion (ſuppoſing it to be true), before we come directly to conſider the argument, it may not be amiſs to inquire how far religion, as a practical inſtitution, may be concerned therein.

And for this purpoſe it is to be obſerved, that probable evidence for the truth or falſehood of any matter of fact differs eſſentially from demonſtration, in that the former admits of degrees, in the greateſt variety, from the higheſt moral certainty down to the loweſt preſumption; which the latter does not.

Let it alſo be further obſerved, that probable evidence is in its nature but an imperfect kind of information, the higheſt degree of which can never reach abſolute certainty, or full proof: and yet to mankind, with regard to their practice, it is in many caſes the very guide of their lives.

Moſt of our actions are determined by the higheſt degrees of probability; as for inſtance, what we do in conſequence of the ſun's riſing to-morrow; of the ſeaſons regularly ſucceeding one another; and that certain kinds of meat and drink will nouriſh. Others are determined by leſſer degrees. Thus rhubarb does not always purge; nor is opium a ſoporific to every perſon that takes it; and yet for all that they are of conſtant uſe for theſe purpoſes in medicine. In all caſes of moment, when to act or forbear may be attended with conſiderable damage, no wiſe man makes the leaſt ſcruple of doing what he apprehends

* May not the long ſought after diſtinction between brutes and men conſiſt in this: That whereas the human underſtanding comprehends both claſſes, the brutal ſagacity is confined only to matters of fact?

may

may be of advantage to him, even though the thing was doubtful, and one ſide of the queſtion as ſupportable as the other: but in matters of the utmoſt conſequence, a prudent man will think himſelf obliged to take notice even of the loweſt probability, and will act accordingly. A great many inſtances might be given in the common purſuits of life, where a man would be conſidered as out of his ſenſes, who would not act, and with great diligence and application too, not only upon an over-chance, but even where the probability might be greatly againſt his ſucceſs.

Suppoſe a criminal under ſentence of death were promiſed a pardon, if he threw twelve with a pair of dice at one throw; here the probability is thirty-ſix to one againſt him, and yet he would be looked upon as mad if he did not try. Nothing in ſuch a caſe would hinder a man from trying, but the abſolute impoſſibility of the event.

Let us now apply this method of reaſoning to the practice of religion. And ſuppoſing the arguments againſt miracles were far more probable than the evidence for them, yet the vaſt importance of religion to our happineſs in every reſpect would ſtill be very ſufficient to recommend it to the practice of every prudent man; and the bare poſſibility that it might prove true, were there nothing elſe to ſupport it, would engage his aſſent and compliance; or elſe he muſt be ſuppoſed to act differently in this reſpect to what he generally does in all the other concerns of his life. So that whether Mr. Hume's reaſonings be true or falſe, religion has ſtill ſufficient evidence to influence the practice of every wiſe and conſiderate man.

This being premiſed, let us now proceed to conſider Mr. Hume's arguments. His reaſoning may be briefly expreſſed in this manner: We have had a long, univerſal, and uninterrupted experience, that no events have happened contrary to the courſe of nature, from conſtant and unvaried obſervations: we have therefore a full proof, that the uniform courſe has not been broke in upon, nor will be, by any particular exceptions. But the obſervation of truth depending upon, and conſtantly following human teſtimony, is by no means univerſal and uninterrupted, and therefore it does not amount to a full proof, that it either has, or will follow it in any particular inſtance. And therefore the proof ariſing from any human teſtimony can never

equal the proof that is deduced againſt a miracle from the very nature of the fact.

This I take to be a full and fair ſtate of this gentleman's reaſoning.

But the anſwer is very plain: if by human teſtimony, he would mean the evidence of any one ſingle man indifferently taken, then indeed his ſecond propoſition would be true; but then the concluſion will by no means follow from it: but if by human teſtimony he would underſtand the evidence of any collection of men, then the ſecond propoſition is falſe, and conſequently the concluſion muſt be ſo too.

That twelve honeſt perſons ſhould combine to aſſert a falſehood, at the hazard of their lives, without any view to private intereſt, and with the certain proſpect of loſing every thing that is and ought to be dear to mankind in this world, is, according to his own way of reaſoning, as great a miracle, to all intents and purpoſes, as any interruption in the common courſe of nature; becauſe no hiſtory has ever mentioned any ſuch thing, nor has any man in any age ever had experience of ſuch a fact.

But here it may be objected, that though it be allowed to be as great a miracle for twelve honeſt men to atteſt a falſehood, contrary to their plain intereſt in every reſpect, as that any alteration ſhould happen in the common courſe of nature, yet theſe evidences being equal, they only deſtroy one another, and ſtill leave the mind in ſuſpence.

This objection draws all its force from Mr. Hume's aſſertion, that an uniform and uninterrupted experience amounts to a full proof, which when examined will not be found true; and indeed I wonder that a writer of his accuracy ſhould venture on ſuch an expreſſion, ſince it is confeſſed on all hands, that all our reaſonings concerning matters of fact ever fall ſhort of certainty, or full proof.

And beſides, the very ſame objection which he makes againſt the veracity of human teſtimony, to weaken its authenticity, may be retorted with equal force againſt his unvaried certainty of the courſe of nature; for doubtleſs the number of approved hiſtories we have relating to miracles, will as much leſſen the probability of what he calls a full proof on his ſide of the queſtion, as all the forgeries and falſehoods that are brought to diſ-

credit

credit human teſtimony, will weaken it on the other. But the beſt way to be aſſured of the falſehood of this objection is to examine it by what we find in our own minds; for that muſt not be admitted as an univerſal principle, which is not true in every particular inſtance.

According to Mr. Hume, we have a full proof of any fact atteſted by twelve honeſt diſintereſted perſons. But would not the probability be increaſed, and our belief of ſuch a fact be the ſtronger, if the number of witneſſes were doubled? I own, my mind immediately aſſents to it. But if this be true, it will then evidently follow, that the proof againſt a miracle, ariſing from the nature of the fact, may, and has been exceeded by contrary human teſtimony.

Suppoſe, as before, that the teſtimony of twelve perſons is juſt equal to it, and we have the evidence of twenty for any particular miracle recorded in the Goſpel; then ſubſtracting the weaker evidence from the ſtronger, we ſhall have the poſitive evidence of eight perſons, for the truth of a common matter of fact.

Q. E. D.

The anſwer I returned to the letter in which this paper was incloſed was in ſubſtance as follows;

SIR,

I AM very much obliged to you for the kind manner in which you have expreſſed yourſelf with regard to me: and it is a pleaſure to me to find, that my reply to Mr. Hume is approved by a gentleman of ſo much good ſenſe, and of ſuch eminency in his profeſſion, as I am well informed you are accounted to be.

I agree with you, that Mr. Hume is an elegant and ſubtile writer, and one of the moſt dangerous enemies to Chriſtianity that has appeared among us. He has a very ſpecious way of managing an argument. But his ſubtilty ſeems to have qualified him not ſo much for clearing an obſcure cauſe, as for puzzling a clear one. Many things in his *Philoſophical Eſſays* have a very plauſible appearance, as well as an uncommon turn, which he viſibly affects; but, upon a cloſe examination of them, I think one may venture to pronounce, that few authors can be mentioned who have fallen into greater abſurdities and inconſiſtencies. And it were to be wiſhed there was not a ſufficient ground for the ſe-

vere cenſure you paſs upon him, when you ſay, that, "with all "his art, he has plainly diſcovered a bad heart, by throwing out "ſome bitter ſneers againſt the Chriſtian revelation, which are "abſolutely inconſiſtent with a ſerious belief, or indeed with any "regard for it, though in ſome parts of his writings he affects a "different way of ſpeaking."

You obſerve, that "we ſeem to be greatly deficient in the lo-"gic of probability, a point which Mr. Hume had ſtudied with "great accuracy." And I readily own, that there is a great appearance of accuracy in what Mr. Hume hath advanced concerning the grounds and degrees of probability, and the different degrees of aſſent due to it. But though what he hath offered this way ſeems plauſible in general, he hath been far from being fair or exact in his application of it.

The paper you have ſent incloſed to me, and which you tell me was drawn up by the young gentleman you mention, contains a ſketch of an attempt to ſhew how Mr. Hume might be confuted on his own principles, and is executed in ſuch a manner, that one cannot but regret, that a gentleman of ſo promiſing a genius, and who might have proved ſignally uſeful, was ſnatched away by a fever about the twentieth year of his age. You allow me to make what uſe of it I judge proper, and ſeem to expect that I ſhould tell you my ſentiments of it with the utmoſt frankneſs and candour. And this obligeth me to acquaint you, that though I look upon the confutation of Mr. Hume in the way this gentleman hath managed it to be ſubtile and ingenious, yet in ſome things it doth not ſeem to me to be quite ſo clear and ſatisfactory, as were to be wiſhed in a matter of ſo great conſequence. He has, I think, from a deſire of confuting Mr. Hume upon his own principles, been led to make too large conceſſions to that gentleman, and hath proceeded upon ſome of his principles as true and valid, which I think may be juſtly conteſted.

Mr. Hume frequently intimates, that there neither is nor can be any certainty in the evidence given concerning matters of fact, or in human teſtimony, which can be ſecurely depended on; and that at beſt, it can be only probable. And the ingenious author of the paper, having obſerved, after Mr. Hume, that we can form no judgment concerning the truth or falſehood of matter of fact, but what is conſtantly regulated by cuſtom or experience,

rience, adds, that " it can never go higher than probability." And again he ſaith, that " probable evidence is in its nature but " an imperfect kind of information; the higheſt degree of which " cannot reach abſolute certainty or full proof:" where he ſeems not to allow, that the evidence concerning matters of fact can ever arrive at ſuch a certainty as to make up a *full proof*. And he repeats it again, that " it is confeſſed on all hands, that all our rea- " ſonings concerning matters of fact ever fall ſhort of certainty or " full proof." And yet if we allow Mr. Hume's definition of a full proof, that it is *ſuch an argument from experience as leaves no room for doubt or oppoſition*, the evidence for a matter of fact may be ſo circumſtanced as to amount to a full proof, and even to a certainty; for I can ſee no reaſon for confining certainty to the evidence we have by intuition or by demonſtration. In treating of certainty as diſtinguiſhed from probability, a twofold certainty may very properly be allowed. The one is, the certainty by intuition or by demonſtration. The other is, a certainty relating to matter of fact. This is indeed of a different kind from the former: but I think it may no leſs juſtly be called certainty, when it ſo fully ſatisfieth the mind, as to leave not the leaſt room for doubt concerning it, and produceth a full aſſurance. And that this is often the caſe with relation to matters of fact cannot reaſonably be denied. The words *ſure* and *certain* are frequently applied in common language to things of this kind, and, for aught I can ſee, very properly. And in the beſt and exacteſt writers it is often deſcribed under the term of *moral certainty*, an expreſſion which this gentleman himſelf makes uſe of*. And it is a great miſtake to imagine, that the word *moral* in that caſe

* The ingenious gentleman ſeems to grant what may be ſufficient, when he ſaith, that probability " in ſome caſes approaches infinitely near to certainty." If it be allowed, that matter of fact may be ſo certain, that the mind may be fully aſſured of it, and ſo as to leave no room for a reaſonable doubt, this is all that is really neceſſary in the preſent controverſy. And this is what Mr. Hume himſelf ſeems ſometimes to allow. But at other times he gives ſuch an account of human teſtimony as tends to render it in all caſes uncertain. And the deſign of his repreſenting it as never riſing higher than probability, ſeems to be to convey an idea of uncertainty and doubt as inſeparably attending all human teſtimony. And to guard againſt the wrong uſe that may be made of this, is the deſign of what I have here obſerved.

is always uſed as a term of diminution, as if it were not to be entirely depended upon. It is only deſigned to ſhew that this certainty is of a different kind, and proceedeth upon different grounds, from that which ariſeth from demonſtration; but yet it may produce as ſtrong an aſſurance in the mind, and which may undoubtedly be depended upon. That there was a war carried on in England in the laſt century between King and Parliament, I only know by human teſtimony. But will any man ſay, that for that reaſon I cannot be ſure of it? Many caſes might be mentioned with regard to matters of fact which we know by human teſtimony, the evidence of which is ſo ſtrong and convincing, that we can no more reaſonably doubt of it, than of the truth of any propoſition which comes to us demonſtrated by the ſtricteſt reaſoning. Mr. Hume himſelf ſeems ſenſible, that it would be wrong to ſay, that every thing which is not matter of demonſtration comes only under the notion of probability. And therefore though he frequently ſeems to claſs all matters of fact under the head of probabilities, yet in the beginning of his Eſſay on Probability, he ſeems to find fault with Mr. Locke for dividing all arguments into *demonſtrative* and *probable*, and obſerves, that to conform our language more to common uſe, we ſhould divide arguments into *demonſtrations*, *proofs*, and *probabilities:* where he ſeems to place what he calls *proofs*, which he explains to be ſuch arguments from experience as leave no room for doubt or oppoſition, in a higher claſs than probabilities. And Mr. Locke himſelf, though he ſeems to confine certainty to demonſtration, yet allows concerning ſome probabilities ariſing from human teſtimony, that "they riſe ſo near to certainty, that "they govern our thoughts as abſolutely, and influence our actions as fully, as the moſt evident demonſtration; and in what "concerns us, we make little or no difference between them and "certain knowledge. Our belief thus grounded riſes to aſſurance *." And in that caſe I think probability is too low a word, and not ſufficiently expreſſive, or properly applicable to things of this kind. For according to Mr. Locke's account of it, and the common uſage of the word, that is ſaid to be probable

* Eſſay on Human Underſtanding, book iv. chap. xv. ſect. 6.

which

which is *likely to be true*, and of which we have *no certainty*, but only *ſome inducements*, as Mr. Locke ſpeaks, to believe and receive them as true.

Another thing obſervable in Mr. Hume's reaſoning on this ſubject is, that in treating of probability or the evidence of facts, which he foundeth wholly upon experience, he confoundeth the evidence of paſt facts with that of the future: and the young gentleman himſelf ſeems not ſufficiently to diſtinguiſh them. The inſtances he produceth to ſhew, that the judgments which the mind forms concerning the probability of events *will always be in proportion to the conſtancy and regularity of the experience*, all relate to the probability of future events from the experience of the paſt. But the queſtion about the probability of any future fact hath properly nothing to do in the preſent controverſy between Mr. Hume and his adverſaries, which relateth wholly to the evidence of paſt facts; and it is only an inſtance of this writer's art, that, by confounding theſe different queſtions, he may perplex the debate, and throw duſt in the eyes of his readers. It will be granted, that with relation to future facts or events, the utmoſt evidence we can attain to from paſt obſervation or experience is a high degree of probability; but with relation to paſt matters of fact, we may in many caſes arrive at a certainty, or what Mr. Hume calls a full proof: yea it often happens, that the evidence of paſt facts may be ſo circumſtanced, that we may be certain that ſuch an event really came to paſs, though, if the queſtion had been put before the event, the probability from paſt experience would have been greatly againſt it. Nothing therefore can be more weak and fallacious than Mr. Hume's reaſoning, when from this principle of forming concluſions concerning future events from paſt experience, he endeavours to deduce an argument againſt the belief of any miraculous fact, how well ſoever atteſted. For though, if the queſtion were concerning a future miracle in any particular inſtance, if we ſhould judge merely from paſt experience, the probability might ſeem to lie againſt it; yet if the queſtion be concerning a paſt miraculous fact, there may be ſuch proof of it, as may not leave room for a reaſonable doubt that the miracle was really done, though before it was done it might ſeem highly improbable that it would be done.

Another

Another fallacy Mr. Hume is guilty of, is his ſuppoſing that in all caſes where the fact, in itſelf conſidered, is unuſual, and out of the way of common experience, whatever be the evidence given for it, there muſt ſtill be a deduction made, and the aſſent given to it is always weakened in proportion to the unuſualneſs of the fact. Now this doth not always hold. A fact of an extraordinary nature may come to us confirmed by an evidence ſo ſtrong, as to produce a full and undoubted aſſurance of its having been done: and in ſuch a caſe there is no deduction to be made; nor is the aſſent we give to the truth of the fact at all weakened on the account of its being unuſual and extraordinary. Thus, *e. g.* that a great king ſhould be openly put to death by his own ſubjects, upon a pretended formal trial before a court of judicature, is very unuſual, and before it came to paſs would have appeared highly improbable; but after it happened, there is ſuch evidence of the fact as to produce a full aſſurance that it was really done; and the man who ſhould go about ſeriouſly to make a doubt of it, and make a formal deduction from the credit of the evidence, on the account of the ſtrangeneſs of the fact, and ſhould pretend that we muſt believe it with an aſſent only proportioned to the evidence which remaineth after that deduction, would, under pretence of extraordinary accuracy, only render himſelf ridiculous. It will indeed be readily owned, that more and greater evidence may be juſtly required with regard to a thing that is unuſual and out of the common courſe, than is required for a common fact; but when there is evidence given ſufficient to ſatisfy the mind, its being unuſual and extraordinary ought not to be urged as a reaſon for not giving a full credit to it, or for pretending that the teſtimony concerning it is not to be depended upon. For the evidence for a fact out of the courſe of common obſervation and experience may be ſo circumſtanced, as to leave no room for the leaſt reaſonable doubt; and the aſſent to it may be as ſtrong and firm as to any the moſt common and ordinary event: nor is any thing in that caſe to be deducted from the credit of the evidence, under pretence of the fact's being unuſual or even miraculous.

You will allow me on this occaſion to take notice of a paſſage in your letter, in which, after having obſerved that Mr. Hume had ſtudied the point about probability, and treated upon it with great

great accuracy, you give it as your opinion, that "the beſt way "of anſwering him would be in the way himſelf has chalked out, "by comparing the degrees of probability in the evidence on "both ſides, and deducting the inferior." Here you ſeem to ſuppoſe, that there is evidence on both ſides in the caſe of miracles, and that, upon balancing the evidence, that which hath the higher degrees of probability ought to be preferred, at the ſame time making a deduction from it in proportion to the weight of the contrary evidence. But the ſuppoſition you here proceed upon appears to me to be a wrong one, *viz.* that in the caſe in queſtion there is evidence on both ſides, and conſequently an oppoſition of evidence, *i. e.* evidence againſt the miracles wrought in proof of Chriſtianity, as well as evidence for them. There is indeed poſitive ſtrong evidence on one ſide, to ſhew that thoſe facts were really done: an evidence drawn from teſtimony ſo circumſtantiated, that it hath all the qualifications which could be reaſonably deſired to render it full and ſatisfactory *. But what evidence is there on the other ſide? No counter-evidence or teſtimony to ſhew the falſehood of this is pretended by Mr. Hume to be produced; nor are there any circumſtances mentioned, attending the evidence itſelf, which may juſtly tend to render it ſuſpicious. Nothing is oppoſed to it but the miraculous nature of the facts, or their being contrary to the uſual courſe of nature; and this cannot properly be ſaid to be any evidence to prove that the facts were not done, or that the teſtimony given to them was falſe. Nor needs there any deduction to be made in the aſſent we give to ſuch a full and ſufficient teſtimony as is here ſuppoſed, on that account: becauſe, as the caſe was circumſtanced, it was proper that thoſe facts ſhould be beyond and out of the common courſe of nature and experience: and it was agreeable to the wiſdom of God, and to the excellent ends for which thoſe facts were deſigned, that they ſhould be ſo: ſince otherwiſe they would not have anſwered the intention, which was to give a divine atteſtation to an important revelation of the higheſt uſe and benefit to mankind.

It is an obſervation of the ingenious author of the paper you ſent me, "That twelve honeſt perſons ſhould combine to aſſert

* See this fully ſhewn in anſwer to Mr. Hume, p. 280, & ſeq.

"a falſe-

" a falſehood, at the hazard of their lives, without any view to " private intereſt, and with the certain proſpect of loſing every " thing that is and ought to be dear to mankind in this world, " is, according to Mr. Hume's own way of reaſoning, as great " a miracle, to all intents and purpoſes, as any interruption in " the common courſe of nature." But then he obſerves, that the thing theſe witneſſes are ſuppoſed to atteſt being alſo a miracle, contrary to the uſual courſe of nature, it may be objected, that theſe evidences being equal, they only deſtroy one another, and ſtill leave the mind in ſuſpenſe. The anſwer he gives to this does not ſeem to me to be ſufficiently clear. He firſt obſerves, that " this objection draws all its force from Mr. Hume's " aſſertion, that an uniform and uninterrupted experience is a " full proof, which when examined will not be found true, be- " cauſe it is confeſſed on all hands, that all our reaſonings con- " cerning matters of fact ever fall ſhort of certainty, or full " proof." But beſides that this doth not always hold, ſince it has been ſhewn, that our reaſonings concerning matters of fact may in ſome caſes amount to ſuch a certainty as may be juſtly called a full proof, it may ſtill be urged, that an uniform uninterrupted experience, though not ſtrictly a full proof, yet is ſuch a proof againſt a miracle as is able to counterbalance the evidence for it: in which caſe the objection ſtill holds, and the mind is kept in ſuſpenſe. And the gentleman himſelf ſeems afterwards to grant, that a fact's being contrary to the uſual courſe of nature affordeth ſuch a proof againſt it from the nature of the thing, as is ſufficient to counterpoiſe the evidence of twelve ſuch witneſſes as are ſuppoſed, though he thinks it would not do ſo, if the number of witneſſes were doubled; and that this ſhews that the proof againſt a miracle ariſing from the nature of the fact may be exceeded by contrary human teſtimony, which is what Mr. Hume denies. And he argues, that if we ſuppoſe the teſtimony of twelve perſons for a miracle to be juſt equal to the evidence ariſing from the nature of the thing againſt it, and that we have the evidence of twenty for any particular miracle recorded in the Goſpel, then ſubſtracting the weaker evidence from the ſtronger, we ſhall have a ſurplus of the poſitive teſtimony of eight perſons, without any thing to oppoſe it.

I am perſuaded, that the deſign of the ingenious gentleman, in putting

putting the caſe after this manner, was to ſignify it as his real opinion, that the teſtimony of twelve ſuch witneſſes as are here ſuppoſed, in proof of a miracle's having been really wrought, did not more than countervail the argument againſt it ariſing from the ſtrangeneſs of the fact: but he had a mind to put the caſe as ſtrongly as he could in favour of Mr. Hume, and yet to ſhew, that there might ſtill be an exceſs of proof, according to his own account, on the ſide of miracles; which deſtroys his main hypotheſis, that the evidence for a miracle can never exceed the evidence againſt it. It appears to me however, that this is making too large a conceſſion, and that it is not the propereſt way of putting the caſe. It proceedeth upon the ſuppoſition, which hath been already ſhewn to be a wrong one, that a thing's being miraculous, or contrary to the uſual courſe of nature, is alone in all circumſtances a proper *proof* or *evidence* againſt the truth of the fact; whereas the caſe may be ſo circumſtanced, that the miraculouſneſs of the fact is in reality no *proof* or *evidence* againſt it at all. It will indeed be acknowledged, as was before hinted, that greater evidence is required with regard to a fact which is miraculous, than for any fact in the common and ordinary courſe. But when ſuch evidence is given, to prove that a miraculous fact was really done, as is ſuitable to the importance of the fact, and which cannot be rejected without admitting ſuppoſitions which are manifeſtly abſurd; in ſuch a caſe, a thing's being miraculous is no juſt reaſon for not giving a full aſſent to the teſtimony concerning it. For its being miraculous, in the caſe that hath been put, hath nothing in it abſurd or incredible; whereas that twelve men of ſound minds and honeſt characters ſhould combine to atteſt a falſehood, in oppoſition to all their worldly intereſts and prejudices, and to every principle that can be ſuppoſed to influence human nature, without any aſſignable cauſe for ſuch a conduct (which has been ſhewn to be the caſe with regard to the witneſſes for Chriſtianity), is abſolutely abſurd, nor can in any way be accounted for. As to the pretence, that in this caſe there is a miracle on both ſides, and that the one is to be oppoſed to the other, and deſtroys its evidence; this ſophiſm, which has impoſed upon many, and in which the chief ſtrength of Mr. Hume's eſſay lies, deriveth its whole force from an abuſe of the word miracle, and a confounding, as this writer

hath

hath artfully done, a miracle and an abſurdity, as if it were the ſame thing. That twelve men ſhould, in the circumſtances ſuppoſed, combine to atteſt a falſehood, at the hazard of their lives and of every thing dear to men, cannot properly be called a miracle, according to any definition that can be reaſonably given of a miracle, or even according to Mr. Hume's own definition of a miracle, that "it is a tranſgreſſion of a law of nature by a "particular volition of the Deity, or by the interpoſal of ſome "inviſible agent:" but is a manifeſt abſurdity. But in the caſe of an extraordinary event, contrary to the uſual courſe of natural cauſes, and wrought for a very valuable purpoſe, and by a power adequate to the effect, there is indeed a proper miracle, but no abſurdity at all. It is true, that its being unuſual and out of the ordinary courſe of obſervation and experience, is a good reaſon for not believing it without a ſtrong and convincing evidence, a much ſtronger evidence than would be neceſſary in common and ordinary facts. But when there is an evidence of its having actually been done, which hath all the requiſites that can be juſtly demanded in ſuch a caſe, and at the ſame time ſufficient reaſons are aſſigned, worthy of the divine wiſdom and goodneſs, to ſhew that it was proper to be done, its being unuſual and extraordinary is no proof at all that it hath not been done, nor can in any propriety of language be called an *evidence* againſt it; and therefore no ſubſtraction is to be made from the credit given to ſuch a ſuppoſed full and ſufficient evidence merely on this account. Perhaps my meaning will be better underſtood, by applying it to a particular inſtance: and I chooſe to mention that which is the principal miracle in proof of Chriſtianity, our Lord's reſurrection. The fact itſelf was evidently miraculous, and required a divine power to accompliſh it. It was therefore neceſſary, in order to lay a juſt foundation for believing it, that there ſhould be ſuch an evidence given as was proportioned to the importance and extraordinarineſs of the fact. And that the evidence which was given of it was really ſuch an evidence, appears, I think, plainly from what I have elſewhere obſerved concerning it *. But if we ſhould put the caſe thus: that not only was the fact extraordinary in itſelf, and out of the

* See above, p. 275, & ſeq.

common

common courſe of nature, but the evidence given of it was inſufficient, and not to be depended upon, and had circumſtances attending it which brought it under a juſt ſuſpicion: or, if contrary evidence was produced to invalidate it; *e. g.* if the ſoldiers that watched the ſepulchre, inſtead of pretending that the body of Jeſus was ſtolen away whilſt they were aſleep, which was no evidence at all, and was a plain acknowledgment that they knew nothing at all of the matter, had declared that the diſciples came with a powerful band of armed men, and overpowered the guard, and carried away the body: or, if any of the Jews had averred, that they were preſent and awake when the ſoldiers ſlept, and that they ſaw the diſciples carry away the body: or, if any of the diſciples to whom Jeſus appeared, and who profeſſed to have ſeen and converſed with him after his reſurrection, had afterwards declared, that they were among the diſciples at thoſe times when he was pretended to have appeared, and that they ſaw no ſuch appearances, nor heard any ſuch converſations as were pretended. On this ſuppoſition, it might be properly ſaid that there was evidence given on both ſides, *viz.* for and againſt Chriſt's reſurrection, and conſequently that there was a real oppoſition of evidence; in which caſe it would be neceſſary carefully to examine the evidences, and compare them one with another, in order to judge which of them deſerved the greater credit, and how far one of them weakened or impaired the force of the other. But as the caſe was circumſtanced, ſince there was a very ſtrong poſitive evidence given, that Chriſt really roſe from the dead, and ſhewed himſelf alive after his reſurrection by many infallible proofs, and no contrary evidence produced againſt it, nor any thing alleged to render the evidence that was given of it juſtly ſuſpected; and ſince there are alſo very good reaſons aſſigned, worthy of the divine wiſdom and goodneſs, which rendered it highly proper that Chriſt ſhould be raiſed from the dead: on this view of the caſe, the extraordinarineſs of the fact, alone conſidered, cannot properly be called an *evidence* againſt the truth of it, nor be juſtly urged as a reaſon for not yielding a full aſſent to the evidence concerning it: for it was neceſſary to the ends propoſed by the divine wiſdom, that the fact ſhould be of an extraordinary and miraculous nature; and if it had not been ſo, it would not have anſwered thoſe ends. I think therefore it may juſtly

juſtly be affirmed, that, taking the caſe in all its circumſtances, conſidering the great ſtrength and force of the evidence that is given for the fact, and the many concurring proofs and atteſtations by which it was confirmed, together with the excellent and important ends for which it was deſigned, there is as juſt ground to believe that Chriſt roſe again from the dead, as that he was crucified; though the latter be a fact not out of the ordinary courſe of nature, and the former was evidently ſo. And here it may not be improper to mention a remarkable obſervation of Mr. Locke. He had, in giving an account of the grounds of probability, ſuppoſed one ground of it to be the conformity of a thing with *our own knowledge, obſervation, and experience*: and after taking notice of ſeveral things to this purpoſe, he obſerves, that "though common experience and the ordinary courſe of "things have juſtly a mighty influence on the minds of men, to "make them give or refuſe credit to any thing propoſed to their "belief, yet there is one caſe wherein the ſtrangeneſs of the fact "leſſens not the aſſent to a fair teſtimony given of it: for where "ſuch ſupernatural events are ſuitable to ends aimed at by him "who has the power to change the courſe of nature; there un-"der ſuch circumſtances they may be fitter to procure belief, by "how much the more they are beyond or contrary to common "obſervation. This is the proper caſe of miracles, which, well "atteſted, do not only find credit themſelves, but give it alſo to "other truths which need ſuch a confirmation *.

Thus this great maſter of reaſon is ſo far from thinking with Mr. Hume, that a thing's being miraculous, or beyond the common courſe of obſervation and experience, abſolutely deſtroys all evidence of teſtimony that can be given concerning the truth of the fact, that in his opinion it doth not ſo much as leſſen the aſſent given to it upon a fair teſtimony; provided the ſupernatural facts thus atteſted were ſuitable to the ends of the divine wiſdom and goodneſs, *i. e.* wrought in atteſtation to a revelation of the higheſt importance, and of the moſt excellent tendency; and that in that caſe the more evidently miraculous the fact is, the fitter it is to anſwer the end propoſed by it.

The ingenious author of the paper you ſent me has very pro-

* Locke's Eſſay on Human Underſtanding, book iv. chap. xvi. ſec. 13.

perly

perly ſummed up Mr. Hume's argument againſt the evidence of miracles, thus: We have had a long, univerſal, and uninterrupted experience, that no events have happened contrary to the courſe of nature, from conſtant and unvaried obſervations. We have therefore a full proof, that this uniform courſe has not been broken in upon, nor will be, by any particular exceptions.

But the obſervation of truth depending upon, and conſtantly following human teſtimony, is by no means univerſal and uninterrupted: and therefore it does not amount to a full proof, that it either has or will follow in any particular inſtance.

And therefore the proof ariſing from any human teſtimony, can never equal the proof that is deduced againſt a miracle from the very nature of the fact.

This he takes to be a full and fair ſtate of Mr. Hume's reaſoning: and it appears to me to be ſo. And he ſays, "The anſwer is "plain. If by human teſtimony he would mean of any one "ſingle man indifferently taken, then his ſecond propoſition "would be true; but then the concluſion would by no means "follow from it: but if by human teſtimony he would underſtand "the evidence of any collection of men, then the ſecond propo- "ſition is falſe, and conſequently the concluſion is ſo too."

This anſwer relateth only to the ſecond propoſition*. But it might have been ſaid, that neither of the propoſitions are to be depended upon, and that they are utterly inſufficient to ſupport the concluſion he would draw from them. For as to the firſt propoſition, it aſſumes the very point in queſtion: it affirms, that no events have ever happened contrary to the courſe of nature; and that this we know by a long, univerſal, and uninterrupted experience. If this be meant univerſal and uninterrupted experience of all mankind in all ages, which alone can be of any

* Though the ingenious gentleman hath not directly and formally anſwered the firſt propoſition, yet he has plainly ſhewn that he doth not admit it, when he ſaith, that "the very ſame objection Mr. Hume makes againſt "the veracity of human teſtimony, to weaken its authenticity, may be retort- "ed with equal force againſt his unvaried certainty of the courſe of nature. "And that doubtleſs the many approved hiſtories we have relating to mira- "cles, will as much leſſen the probability of what he calls a full proof on his "ſide of the queſtion, as all the forgeries and falſehoods that are brought to "diſcredit human teſtimony will weaken it on the other."

force in the preſent argument, how doth it appear that we know by univerſal and uninterrupted experience, that no ſuch events have ever happened? Are there not ſeveral events of this kind recorded by credible teſtimonies to have happened? The whole argument then is upon a wrong foundation. It proceedeth upon an univerſal and uninterrupted experience, not broken in upon in any inſtance. And there is good teſtimony to prove, that it hath been broken in upon in ſeveral inſtances. And if it hath been broken in upon in any inſtances, no argument can be brought from experience to prove that it hath not, or may not be broken in upon; and ſo the whole reaſoning falls. If it be alledged, that theſe teſtimonies, or indeed any teſtimonies at all, ought not to be admitted in this caſe, the queſtion returns, For what reaſon ought they not to be admitted? If the reaſon be, as it muſt be according to Mr. Hume, becauſe there is an univerſal uninterrupted experience againſt them, this is to take it for granted, that no ſuch events have ever happened: for if there have been any inſtances of ſuch events, the experience is not univerſal and uninterrupted. So that we ſee what the boaſted argument againſt miracles from uniform experience comes to. It in effect comes to this, that no ſuch events have ever happened, becauſe no ſuch events have ever happened.

As to the ſecond propoſition, though if we ſpeak of human teſtimony in general, it will be eaſily allowed, that it is not to be abſolutely and univerſally depended upon; yet, as hath been already hinted, it may in particular inſtances be ſo circumſtanced, as to yield a ſatisfying aſſurance, or what may not improperly be called a full proof. Even the teſtimony of a particular perſon may in ſome caſes be ſo circumſtanced, as to leave no room for reaſonable ſuſpicion or doubt. But eſpecially if we ſpeak of what this gentleman calls *a collection of men*, this may in ſome caſes be ſo ſtrong, as to produce a full and entire conviction, however improbable the atteſted fact might otherwiſe appear to be. And therefore if we meet with any teſtimonies relating to particular events of an extraordinary nature, they are not immediately to be rejected, under pretence of their being contrary to paſt experience; but we muſt carefully examine the evidence brought for them, whether it be of ſuch a kind as to make it reaſonable for us to believe them: and that the evidence

brought

brought for the miraculous facts recorded in the gospel are of this kind hath been often clearly shewn.

The only farther reflection I shall make on this gentleman's paper is, that it contains good and proper observations concerning our being determined in matters of practice by probabilities: That in all cases of moment, where to act or forbear may be attended with considerable damage, no wise man makes the least scruple of doing what he apprehends may be of advantage to him, even though the thing were doubtful: but in matters of the utmost consequence, a prudent man will think himself obliged to take notice of the lowest probability, and will act accordingly. This he applies to the practice of religion, and observes, that considering the vast importance of religion to our happiness in every respect,—the bare possibility that it might prove true, were there nothing else to support it, would engage his assent and compliance: or else he must be supposed to act differently in this respect to what he generally does in all the other concerns of his life.

This observation is not entirely new, but it is handsomely illustrated by this gentleman, and seems very proper to shew, that those who neglect and despise religion, do in this, notwithstanding their boasted pretences, act contrary to the plain dictates of reason and good sense. But we need not have recourse to this supposition. The evidence on the side of religion is vastly superior. And if this be the case, no words can sufficiently express the folly and unreasonableness of their conduct, who take up with slight prejudices and presumptions in opposition to it; and by choosing *darkness rather than light*, and rejecting *the great salvation* offered in the Gospel, run the utmost hazard of exposing themselves to a heavy condemnation and punishment.

Thus I have taken the liberty you allowed me of giving my thoughts upon the paper you sent me. I cannot but look upon the young gentleman's attempt to be a laudable and ingenious one, though there are some things in his way of managing the argument, which seem not to have been thoroughly considered, and which, I am satisfied, he would have altered, if he had lived to take an accurate review of the subject.

This, with a few additions since made to it, is the substance of the answer I returned to the worthy gentleman who had written to

me, and which I have here inſerted, becauſe there are ſome things in it that may tend to the farther illuſtration of what I had offered in my remarks on Mr. Hume's *Eſſay on Miracles*. My next will contain ſome additional obſervations relating to the Abbé de Paris, and the miracles attributed to him; together with reflections on ſome paſſages in Mr. Hume's *Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals*, which ſeem to be intended to expoſe Chriſtianity.

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LETTER XXI.

Some Reflections on the extraordinary Sanctity aſcribed to the Abbé de Paris—He carried Superſtition to a ſtrange Exceſs, and by his extraordinary Auſterities voluntarily haſtened his own Death—His Character and Courſe of Life, of a different kind from that rational and ſolid Piety and Virtue which is recommended in the Goſpel—Obſervations on ſome Paſſages in Mr. Hume's Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals—*He reckons* Self-denial, Mortification, *and* Humility *among the Monkiſh Virtues, and repreſents them as not only uſeleſs, but as having a bad Influence on the Temper and Conduct—The Nature of Self-denial explained, and its great Uſefulneſs and Excellence ſhewn—What is to be underſtood by the Mortification required in the Goſpel—This alſo is a reaſonable and neceſſary Part of our Duty—Virtue, according to Mr. Hume, hath nothing to do with Sufferance—But by the Acknowledgment of the wiſeſt Moraliſts, one important Office of it is to ſupport and bear us up under Adverſity—The Nature of Humility explained—It is an excellent and amiable Virtue.*

SIR,

THE miracles of the Abbé de Paris have made ſo great a noiſe in the world, and ſo much advantage hath been taken of them by the enemies of Chriſtianity, and particularly by Mr. Hume, that I thought it neceſſary to conſider them pretty largely above in the nineteenth Letter. Some things have occurred ſince, which have ſome relation to that matter, and which I ſhall here take notice of.

In that Letter, p. 352, mention is made of the high opinion the people had conceived of the Abbé's extraordinary ſanctity, as what tended very much to raiſe their expectations of miracles to be wrought at his tomb, and by his interceſſion. If we inquire whence this opinion of his extraordinary ſanctity aroſe, and upon what it was founded, we ſhall find it to have been principally owing to the exceſſive auſterities in which he exerciſed himſelf for ſeveral years; of which therefore, and of ſome remarkable

things in his life and his character, it may not be improper to give ſome account. The particulars I ſhall mention are ſet forth at large by the learned Mr. Moſheim, in a diſſertation on the miracles of the Abbé de Paris, and which I did not meet with till after the publication of the ſecond volume of the *View of the Deiſtical Writers.* It is intitled, *Inquiſitio in veritatem miraculorum Franciſci de Paris ſæculi noſtri thaumaturgi**. What he there tells us concerning Monſ. de Paris is faithfully taken from thoſe who hold him in the higheſt admiration, the Janſeniſtical writers. And from their accounts it ſufficiently appears, that his whole life, and eſpecially the latter part of it, was one continued ſcene of the moſt abſurd ſuperſtition, and which he carried to an exceſs that may be thought to border upon madneſs.

He was the eldeſt ſon of an ancient, rich, and honourable family, and therefore born to an opulent fortune; though his father, when he ſaw his turn of mind, very prudently left him but a part of it, and that in the hands and under the care of his younger brother. But though he ſtill had an ample proviſion made for him, he voluntarily deprived himſelf of all the conveniencies, and even the neceſſaries, of life. He choſe one obſcure hole or cottage after another to live in, and often mixed with beggars, whom he reſembled ſo much in his cuſtoms, ſordid and tattered garb, and whole manner of his life, that he was ſometimes taken for one, and was never better pleaſed, than when this expoſed him in the ſtreets and ways to deriſion and contempt. Poverty was what he ſo much affected, that though he applied to his brother for what his father had left him, yet that he might not have the appearance of being rich, he choſe not to take it as what was legally due to him, but to ſupplicate for it in the humbleſt terms, as for an alms freely beſtowed upon a miſerable object that had nothing of his own. And yet afterwards in his laſt will, he diſpoſed of it as his own to various uſes as he thought fit, eſpecially for the benefit of thoſe who had been ſufferers for the Janſeniſt cauſe. For ſeveral of the laſt years of his life, he ſeemed to make it his buſineſs to contrive ways to weaken or harraſs, and torment his body, and thereby haſten his own death.

* Vide Jo. Laur. Moſhemii Diſſertationum ad Hiſtoriam Eccleſiaſticam pertinentium volumen ſecundum.

Whilſt

Whilſt he gave away his income to the poor, he himſelf voluntarily endured all the evils and hardſhips which attended the extremity of want and poverty. Mean and wretched was his garb; black bread, water, and herbs, but without oil, ſalt, or vinegar, or any thing to give them ſavour, was his only ſuſtenance, and that but once a day. He lay upon the ground, and was worn away with continual watching. After his death were found, his hair ſhirt, an iron croſs, a girdle, ſtomacher, and bracelets of the ſame metal, all beſtuck with ſharp points. Theſe were the inſtruments of penitence, with which he was wont to chaſtiſe himſelf, the plain marks of which he bore on his body. By ſuch a courſe he brought himſelf not only into great weakneſs of body, but into diſorders of mind: and this, which was the natural effect of his manner of living, he attributed to the influence of the devil, whom God had in juſt judgment permitted to puniſh him for his ſins. And in inquiring into the cauſes of the divine diſpleaſure, he fixed upon this, that he had ſtill too great a love for human learning and knowledge, and therefore from thenceforth did all he could to diveſt himſelf of it, and would have ſold his well-furniſhed library, if he had not been prevented by ſome of his friends, whoſe intereſt it was to preſerve it. For two years together he refuſed to come to the holy ſupper, under pretence that it was not lawful for him to come, God having required him to abſtain from it; and it was with great difficulty that he was brought to it at laſt, by the threatenings and even reproaches of his confeſſor. Finally, that no kind of miſery might be wanting to him, he choſe for his companion, to dwell with him in his cottage, a man that was looked upon to be crazy, and who treated him in the moſt injurious manner. He did all he could to hide himſelf from his friends, in one ſorry cottage after another; and about a month before his death, fixed himſelf in a little lodge in the corner of a garden, expoſed to the ſun and wind. When by ſuch ſeverities he had brought himſelf into an univerſal bad habit of body, and it was viſible to his friends, that if he continued in that courſe he could not long ſupport under it, a phyſician was called in, who only deſired him to remove to a more commodious habitation, to allow himſelf more ſleep, and a better diet, and eſpecially to take nouriſhing broths for reſtoring his enfeebled conſtitution. But all the perſuaſions

ſuaſions of his phyſician, confeſſor, and of his friends, and the tears of an only brother, could not prevail with him to follow an advice ſo reaſonable and practicable; though he was aſſured, that, if he uſed that method, there was great hope of his recovery, and that his life could not be preſerved without it. And when at laſt, to ſatisfy their importunity, he ſeemed ſo far to comply, as to be willing to take ſome broth, it was only an appearance of complying, for he took care to give ſuch orders to the perſon who was to prepare it for him, that it really yielded little or no nouriſhment. Thus it was manifeſt, that he had determined to haſten, as much as in him lay, his own death. And accordingly he told his confeſſor, that this life had nothing in it to make it worth a Chriſtian's care to preſerve it. His friends acknowledge, that his death was the effect "of the almoſt incredible auſterities that he exerciſed during the laſt four years of "his life." His great admirer the Abbé de Asfeld teſtifies, that he heard him declare it as his purpoſe to yield himſelf a ſlow ſacrifice to divine juſtice.

This his extraordinary courſe of auſterities, together with the zeal he expreſſed to the very laſt for the Janſeniſt cauſe, which he ſhewed alſo by the diſpoſitions he made in his will, as well as by his appealing, as with his dying breath, to a future general council againſt the conſtitution *Unigenitus*, procured him ſo extraordinary a reputation, that he has paſſed for one of the greateſt ſaints that ever appeared in the Chriſtian church. No ſooner was he dead, but an innumerable multitude of people ran to his corpſe, ſome of whom kiſſed his feet, others cut off part of his hair as a remedy againſt all manner of evil; others brought books or bits of cloth to touch his body, as believing it filled with a divine virtue. Thus were they prepared to believe and expect the moſt wonderful things.

Whoſoever impartially conſiders the ſeveral things that have been mentioned, and which are amply verified in the places referred to in the margin*, will not think the learned Moſheim in the wrong, when he pronounceth, that it cannot in conſiſtency with reaſon be ſuppoſed, that God ſhould extraordinarily interpoſe by his own divine power, to do honour to the bones and

* See Moſheim, ut ſupra, from p. 364. to p. 395.

aſhes

aſhes of a man weak and ſuperſtitious to a degree of folly, and who was knowingly and wilfully acceſſory to his own death. In vain do his admirers, as he himſelf had done, extol his thus deſtroying himſelf as an offering up himſelf a voluntary ſacrifice to divine juſtice. If a man ſhould under the ſame pretence diſpatch himſelf at once with a piſtol or poniard, would this be thought a proper juſtification of his conduct? And yet I ſee not why the pretence might not as well hold in the one caſe as in the other; ſince it makes no great difference, whether the death was ſwifter or ſlower, provided it was brought on with a deliberate intention and deſign.

How different is this from the beautiful and noble idea of piety and virtue which the Goſpel furniſheth us with, and from the perfect pattern of moral excellence which is ſet us by our bleſſed Saviour himſelf in his own holy life and practice! That the great apoſtle St. Paul was far from encouraging ſuch auſterities as tended to hurt and deſtroy the bodily health, ſufficiently appears from the advice he gave to Timothy, *Drink no longer water, but uſe a little wine, for thy ſtomach's ſake, and thine often infirmities*—1 Tim. v. 23. He condemneth thoſe that, under pretence of extraordinary purity, were for obſerving the *ordinances* and *traditions* of men, *Touch not, taſte not, handle not;* and brands their practice under the name of *will-worſhip*, a *voluntary humility*, and *neglecting*, or, as the word might be rendered, *not ſparing the body*, Col. ii. 20, 21, 22, 23. That which in the caſe of Abbé de Paris is cried up by his admirers as a carrying religion to the higheſt degree of perfection, *viz.* his abſtaining from fleſh, and confining himſelf to herbs, is repreſented by the apoſtle Paul as a ſign of weakneſs in the faith—Rom. xiv. 2.

It hath always appeared to me to be the glory of the Chriſtian religion, as preſcribed in the New Teſtament, that the piety it teacheth us is ſolid and rational, remote from all ſuperſtitious extremes, worthy of a God of infinite wiſdom and goodneſs to require, and becoming the true dignity of the reaſonable nature. It comprehendeth not only immediate acts of devotion towards God, but a diligent performance of all relative duties, and the faithful diſcharge of the various offices incumbent upon us in the civil and ſocial life. It requireth us indeed to bear with a noble fortitude

fortitude the greateſt evils, when we are regularly called to ſuffer for the cauſe of God, but not raſhly to expoſe ourſelves to thoſe evils, or to bring them upon ourſelves.

The wiſe and beneficent author of nature hath ſtored the whole world about us with a variety of benefits: and can it be thought to be agreeable to his will, that, inſtead of taſting his goodneſs in the bleſſings he vouchſafeth us, we ſhould make a merit of never allowing ourſelves to enjoy them? How much more rational is it to receive thoſe bleſſings with thankfulneſs, and enjoy them with temperance, according to that of St. Paul—*Every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refuſed, if it be received with thankſgiving: for it is ſanctified by the word of God and prayer*, 1 Tim. iv. 4, 5. Can it be pleaſing to our merciful heavenly Father, that we ſhould not merely humble and chaſten ourſelves on ſpecial occaſions, but make it our conſtant buſineſs to torment ourſelves, and to impair and deſtroy the bodies he hath given us, and thereby unfit ourſelves for the proper offices of life? Is it reaſonable to imagine, that under the mild diſpenſation of the Goſpel, which breathes an ingenuous cheerful ſpirit, and raiſeth us to the noble liberty of the children of God, the beſt way of recommending ourſelves to his favour ſhould be to deny ourſelves all the comforts he affordeth us, and to paſs our lives in perpetual ſadneſs and abſtinence? Could it be ſaid in that caſe, that *godlineſs is profitable unto all things, having promiſe of the life that now is, and of that which is to come?* 1 Tim. iv. 8. It is true, that mortification and ſelf-denial are important goſpel duties, but how different from the extremes of ſuperſtitious rigour will appear, when I come to vindicate the evangelical morality againſt the objections of Mr. Hume. It was not till Chriſtians began to degenerate from that lovely form of rational, ſolid piety and virtue, of which Chriſt himſelf exhibited the moſt perfect example, that they laid ſo mighty a ſtreſs on thoſe ſevere and rigorous auſterities, which neither our Saviour nor his apoſtles had commanded. And in this reſpect ſome of thoſe who were anciently deemed heretical ſects carried it to a greater degree of ſtrictneſs than the orthodox themſelves. And many zealots there have been in falſe religions, and particularly ſome of the heathen devotees in the Eaſt Indies, who in ſevere penances, and rigid auſterities, and in voluntary torments inflicted

flicted on their own bodies, have far exceeded the Abbé de Paris himſelf.

I think no farther obſervations need be made with regard to Mr. Hume's *Eſſay on Miracles*, which is directly levelled againſt Chriſtianity. But any one that is acquainted with his writings muſt be ſenſible, that he often takes occaſion to throw out inſinuations againſt religion, which he uſually repreſents either under the notion of ſuperſtition or enthuſiaſm. Even the morals of the goſpel have not eſcaped his cenſure, though their excellence is ſuch as to have forced acknowledgments from ſome of thoſe who have been ſtrongly prejudiced againſt it.

There is a paſſage to this purpoſe in his *Inquiry concerning the Principles of Morals*, which deſerves particular notice. In that Inquiry, as in all his other works, he aſſumes the merit of making new diſcoveries, and placing things in a better light than any man had done before him; and wonders that a theory ſo *ſimple and obvious* as that which he hath advanced, *could have eſcaped the moſt elaborate ſcrutiny and examination**. I will not deny that there are in that Inquiry ſome good and curious obſervations; but I can ſee little that can be properly called new in his theory of morals, except his extending the notion of virtue (and it is concerning the principles of morals, and therefore concerning moral virtue, that his Inquiry proceeds) ſo as to comprehend under it every agreeable quality and accompliſhment, ſuch as *wit*, *ingenuity*, *eloquence*, *quickneſs of conception*, *facility of expreſſion*, *delicacy of taſte* in the finer arts, *politeneſs*†,

* Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals, p. 172.

† It has been hinted to me by a worthy friend, that ſome have thought I did wrong in not allowing *politeneſs* to be ranked among the moral virtues. And therefore to prevent miſtakes, I now obſerve, that if by politeneſs be meant a kind, obliging behaviour, expreſſive of humanity and benevolence, and flowing from it, it may be juſtly reckoned among the virtues: and in this ſenſe a plain countryman, who is good-natured and obliging in his deportment to the utmoſt of his power, may be ſaid to be truly a polite man. But this ſeems not to be the uſual acceptation of the word in our language. By *politeneſs* is commonly underſtood a being well verſed in the forms of what is uſually called *good breeding*, and a genteel behaviour. And taken in that ſenſe, however agreeable and ornamental it may be, I apprehend it is not properly a moral virtue; nor is the want of it a vice. And I believe it will ſcarce be denied, that a man may be really a good and worthy perſon, and yet not be what the world calls a polite well-bred man.

cleanlineſs,

cleanlineſs, and even *force of body**. I cannot ſee what valuable end it can anſwer in a treatiſe of morals to extend the notion of virtue ſo far. It is of high importance to mankind rightly to diſtinguiſh things that are morally good and excellent from thoſe which are not ſo; and therefore great care ſhould be taken, that both our ideas of theſe things, and the expreſſions deſigned to ſignify them, ſhould be kept diſtinct. Wit, eloquence, and what we call natural parts, as well as acquired learning, politeneſs, cleanlineſs, and even ſtrength of body, are no doubt real advantages, and when under a proper direction, and rightly applied, are both ornamental and uſeful, and are therefore not to be neglected, but, as far as we are able, to be cultivated and improved. This will be eaſily acknowledged: and if this be all Mr. Hume intends, it is far from being a new diſcovery. But theſe things make properly no part of moral virtue; nor can a man be ſaid to be good and virtuous on the account of his being poſſeſſed of thoſe qualities. He may have wit, eloquence, a polite behaviour, a fine taſte in the arts, great bodily ſtrength and reſolution, and yet be really a bad man. And when theſe things are ſeparated from good diſpoſitions of the heart, from probity, benevolence, fidelity, integrity, gratitude, inſtead of rendering a man uſeful to the community, they qualify him for doing a great deal of miſchief. Theſe qualities therefore ſhould be carefully diſtinguiſhed from thoſe which conſtitute a good moral character, and which ought to be principally recommended to the eſteem and approbation of mankind, as having in themſelves a real invariable worth and excellence, and as deriving a merit and value to every other quality. Nor is it proper, in a treatiſe of morals, which pretends to any degree of accuracy, to confound them all together under one common appellation of virtue.

And as Mr. Hume enlargeth his notion of virtue, ſo as to take in ſeveral things that do not ſeem properly to belong to the moral diſpoſitions and qualities, ſo he excludeth from that character ſome things which are recommended in the goſpel as of importance to the moral temper and conduct, particularly humility and ſelf-denial. He obſerves, that "celibacy, faſting, penance,

* See the 6th, 7th, and 8th ſections of the Inquiry concerning the Principles of Morals, particularly p. 127, 128. 131. 135. 137. 162. 165.

"mortification,

" mortification, ſelf-denial, humility, ſolitude, and the whole " train of monkiſh virtues, are every-where rejected by men of " ſenſe, becauſe they ſerve no manner of purpoſe: they neither " advance a man's fortune in the world, nor render him a more " valuable member of ſociety, neither qualify him for the enter- " tainment of company, nor increaſe his power of ſelf-enjoy- " ment——On the contrary, they croſs all theſe deſirable ends, " ſtupify the underſtanding, and harden the heart, obſcure the " fancy, and ſour the temper*." Our author is here pleaſed to claſs *humility*, *mortification*, and *ſelf-denial*, which are evidently required in the goſpel, with *penances*, *celibacy*, and what he calls the monkiſh virtues; and pronounceth concerning all alike, that they are rejected by all *men of ſenſe*, and not only ſerve no manner of purpoſe, but have a bad influence in ſtupifying the underſtanding, hardening the heart, and ſouring the temper. This is no doubt to caſt a ſlur upon the goſpel ſcheme of morality. And on the other hand he cries up his own theory of morals, as repreſenting *Virtue in all her engaging charms*. That " nothing appears but gentleneſs, humanity, beneficence, affa- " bility, nay even at proper intervals, play, frolic, and gaiety. " She talks not of uſeleſs auſterities and rigours, ſufferance and " ſelf-denial, &c. †." A ſcheme of morals which includeth *play*, *frolic*, and *gaiety*, and has nothing to do with *ſelf-denial*, *mortification*, and *ſufferance*, will no doubt be very agreeable to many in this gay and frolicſome age. But let us examine more diſtinctly what ground there is for our author's cenſures, as far as the Chriſtian morals are concerned.

To begin with that which he ſeemeth to have a particular averſion to, *ſelf-denial*. This is certainly what our Saviour expreſsly requireth of thoſe who would approve themſelves his faithful diſciples. He inſiſteth upon it, as an eſſential condition of their diſcipleſhip, that they ſhould deny themſelves—Mat. xvi. 24. Mark viii. 34. And if we do not ſuffer ourſelves to be frightened by the mere ſound of words, but conſider what is really intended, this is one of the moſt uſeful leſſons of morality, and a neceſſary ingredient in a truly excellent and virtuous character. One thing intended in this ſelf-denial is the reſtraining and go-

* Inquiry concerning the Principles of Morals, p. 174. † Ibid. p. 188.

verning

verning our appetites and paſſions, and keeping them within proper bounds, and in a due ſubjection to the higher powers of reaſon and conſcience: and this is certainly an important part of ſelf-government and diſcipline, and is undoubtedly a noble attainment, and which argueth a true greatneſs of ſoul. And however difficult or diſagreeable it may at firſt be to the animal part of our natures, it is really neceſſary to our happineſs, and layeth the beſt foundation for a ſolid tranquillity and ſatisfaction of mind. Again, if we take ſelf-denial for a readineſs to deny our private intereſt and advantage for valuable and excellent ends, for the honour of God, or the public good, for promoting the happineſs of others, or our own eternal ſalvation, and for ſerving the cauſe of truth and righteouſneſs in the world; in this view nothing can be more noble and praiſe-worthy. And indeed whoever conſiders that an inordinate ſelfiſhneſs, and addictedneſs to a narrow fleſhly intereſt, and the gratification of the carnal appetites and paſſions, is the ſource of the chief diſorders of human life, will be apt to look upon ſelf-denial to be of great conſequence to morals. Without ſome degree of ſelf-denial, nothing truly great, noble, or generous is to be atchieved or attained. He that cannot bear to deny himſelf upon proper occaſions, will never be of any great uſe either to himſelf or to others, nor can make any progreſs in the moſt virtuous and excellent endowments, or even in agreeable qualities, and true politeneſs. This writer himſelf, ſpeaking of *the love of fame*, which, he tells us, rules in all generous minds, obſerves, that as this prevaileth, *the animal conveniences ſink gradually in their value**. And elſewhere, in the perſon of the Stoic philoſopher, he ſaith, that "we muſt often make ſuch important ſacrifices, as thoſe of life "and fortune, to virtue:" And that "the man of virtue looks "down with contempt on all the allurements of pleaſure, and all "the menaces of danger—toils, dangers, and death itſelf carry "their charms, when we brave them for the public good †." And even after having told us, that virtue talks not of ſufferance and ſelf-denial, he adds, that "virtue never willingly parts with any "pleaſure, but in hope of ample compenſation in ſome other

* Inquiry concerning the Principles of Morals, p. 188.

† See the 19th of his Moral and Political Eſſays, p. 213.

"period

" period of their lives. The ſole trouble ſhe demands is of a juſt " calculation, and a ſteady preference of the greater happineſs *." Here he allows, that virtue may reaſonably part with preſent pleaſure, in hope of an ample compenſation in ſome other period of our lives, when upon a juſt calculation it contributes to our greater happineſs. But then he ſeems to confine the hope of the compenſation which virtue is to look for, to ſome future period of this preſent life, which, conſidering the ſhortneſs and uncertainty of it, is little to be depended on, and may perhaps be thought not a ſufficient foundation for a man's denying himſelf preſent pleaſures and advantages. But the goſpel propoſeth a much more noble and powerful conſideration, *viz.* the ſecuring a future everlaſting happineſs; and ſuppoſing the certainty of this, of which we have the fulleſt aſſurance given us, nothing can be more agreeable to all the rules of reaſon and juſt calculation, than to part with preſent pleaſure, or to undergo preſent hardſhips, to obtain it.

What hath been offered with regard to the important duty of ſelf-denial may help us to form a juſt notion of *mortification*, which is nearly connected with it, and which our author alſo findeth great fault with. The chief thing intended by it is the ſubduing our fleſhly appetites, and our vicious and irregular inclinations and deſires. To this purpoſe it is required of us, that we *mortify the deeds of the body*, Rom. viii. 13. that we *mortify our members that are on the earth, fornication, uncleanneſs, inordinate affection, evil concupiſcence, and covetouſneſs, which is idolatry*, Col. iii. 5.; and that we *crucify the fleſh, with the affections and luſts*, Gal. v. 24. Mortification taken in this view is a noble act of virtue, and abſolutely neceſſary to maintain the dominion of the ſpirit over the fleſh, the ſuperiority of reaſon over the inferior appetites. Where theſe prevail, they tend to *ſtupify the underſtanding, and harden the heart*, and hinder a man from being a *valuable member of ſociety*, which is what Mr. Hume moſt unjuſtly chargeth upon that mortification and ſelf-denial which is required in the goſpel. Mortification is properly oppoſed to that indulging and pampering the fleſh, which tendeth to nouriſh and ſtrengthen thoſe appetites and luſts, which it is the part

* Inquiry concerning the Principles of Mora's, p. 188.

of

of a wife and virtuous man to correct and ſubdue. Even faſting upon proper ſeaſons and occaſions, however ridiculed by Mr. Hume and others, may anſwer a very valuable end, and make a uſeful part of ſelf-diſcipline. It may tend both to the health of the body, and to keep the mind more clean and vigorous, as well as, when accompanied with prayer, promote a true ſpirit of devotion. But in this as in every thing elſe, the Chriſtian religion, conſidered in its original purity as laid down in the New Teſtament, preſerveth a moſt wiſe moderation, and is far from carrying things to extremes, as ſuperſtition hath often done. It doth not any-where inſiſt upon exceſſive, or what our author calls uſeleſs rigours and auſterities. And ſo far is that mortification which the Goſpel preſcribeth, and which is nothing more than the keeping the body under a juſt diſcipline, and in a due ſubjection to the law of the mind, from being inconſiſtent with the true pleaſure and ſatisfaction of life, that it layeth the moſt ſolid foundation for it. Mr. Hume himſelf takes notice of the "*ſupreme joy* which is to be found in the victories over vice, "when men are taught to govern their paſſions, to reform their "vices, and ſubdue their worſt enemies, which inhabit within "their own boſoms*."

Not only does this gentleman find fault with ſelf-denial and mortification, but with *ſufferance*. Virtue, according to his repreſentation of it, *talks not of ſufferance and ſelf-denial*. And yet certain it is, that among the beſt moraliſts of all ages it has been accounted one of the principal offices of virtue, to ſupport us with a ſteady fortitude under all the evils that befal us in this preſent ſtate, and enable us patiently and even cheerfully to bear them. A virtue that cannot ſuffer adverſity, nor bear us up under it with dignity, and in a proper manner, is of little value in a world where we are expoſed to ſuch a variety of troubles and ſorrows. And in this the Goſpel morality is infinitely ſuperior to that of the moſt admired pagan philoſophers. Mr. Hume has reckoned among virtues "an undiſturbed philoſophi-"cal tranquillity, ſuperior to pain, ſorrow, anxiety, and each "aſſault of adverſe fortune†." But what is this philoſophical

* Moral and Political Eſſays, p. 213.

† Inquiry concerning the Principles of Morals, p. 152.

tranquillity

tranquillity, ſo much boaſted of, relying only upon itſelf, compared with that which ariſeth from the conſolations ſet before us in the goſpel, from the aſſurances of divine aſſiſtances and ſupports, from the love of God and ſenſe of his favour, from the lively animating hopes of glory, and the eternal rewards which ſhall crown our patience, and perſevering continuance in well-doing?

The laſt thing I ſhall take notice of, as repreſented under a diſadvantageous character by Mr. Hume, though highly commended and inſiſted on by our Saviour, is *humility:* and this rightly underſtood is one of the moſt amiable virtues, and greateſt ornaments of the human nature. Our author is pleaſed to talk of a *certain degree of pride and ſelf-valuation*, the want of which is *a vice*, and the oppoſite to which is *meanneſs*.*. But to call a proper generoſity of mind, which is above a mean or baſe thing, *pride*, is an abuſe of words, which ought not to be admitted, if we would ſpeak with exactneſs, in an inquiry concerning morals. It is to give the name of an odious vice to a very worthy diſpoſition of ſoul. The goſpel humility is a very different thing from meanneſs. It is very conſiſtent with ſuch a juſt ſelf-valuation, as raiſeth us above every thing falſe, mean, baſe, and impure, and keepeth us from doing any thing unbecoming the dignity of the reaſonable nature, and the glorious character and privileges we are inveſted with as Chriſtians. True humility doth not abſolutely exclude all ſenſe of our own good qualities and attainments; but it tempers the ſenſe we have of them with a juſt conviction of our abſolute dependance upon God for every good thing we are poſſeſſed of, and of our manifold ſins, infirmities, and defects. It is oppoſed to a vain-glorious boaſting and ſelf-ſufficiency, and to ſuch a high conceit of our abilities and merits, as puffeth us up with a preſumptuous confidence in ourſelves, and contempt of others, and which is indeed one of the greateſt hinderances to our progreſs in the moſt excellent and worthy attainments. It manifeſteth itſelf towards God, by an entire unreſerved ſubjection and reſignation to his authority and will, by proper acknowledgments of our own unworthineſs before him, and a ſenſe of our continual dependance upon him, and conſtant

* Inquiry concerning the Principles of Morals, p. 146, 147.

need of his gracious aſſiſtance. And it expreſſeth itſelf towards men, by cauſing us to yield a due ſubmiſſion to our ſuperiors, and to be affable and condeſcending to our inferiors, courteous and obliging towards our equals, in honour preferring one another, as St. Paul expreſſeth it, and ready to bear with each other's weakneſſes and abſurdities. In a word, it diffuſeth its kindly influence through the whole of our deportment, and all the offices of life. Nothing is ſo hateful as pride and arrogance. And true humility is ſo amiable, ſo engaging, ſo neceſſary to render a perſon agreeable, that no man can hope to pleaſe, who hath not at leaſt the appearance of it. Our author himſelf obſerves, that "among well-bred people, a mutual deference is "affected, contempt of others diſguiſed*:" and that "as we are "naturally proud and ſelfiſh, and apt to aſſume the preference "above others, a polite man is taught to behave with deference "towards thoſe he converſes with, and to yield the ſuperiority "to them in all the common occurrences of ſociety†." So that, according to him, a ſhew of humility and preferring others to ourſelves, is a neceſſary part of good behaviour; and yet he is pleaſed to reckon humility among thoſe things that neither render a man a more valuable member of ſociety, nor qualify him for the entertainment of company, but on the contrary croſs thoſe deſirable purpoſes, and harden the heart, and ſour the temper.

But enough of Mr. Hume; who, if we may judge of him by his writings, will ſcarce be charged with the fault of having carried humility to an exceſs. A pity it is that he hath not made a better uſe of his abilities and talents, which might have laid a juſt foundation for acquiring the praiſe he ſeems ſo fond of, as well as rendered him really uſeful to the world, if he had been as induſtrious to employ them in ſerving and promoting the excellent cauſe of religion, as he hath unhappily been in endeavouring to weaken and expoſe it!

* Inquiry concerning the Principles of Morals, p. 161, 162.

† Moral and political Eſſays, p. 184, 185.

POST-

POSTSCRIPT.

AFTER great part of this work was finiſhed, and ſent to the preſs, I met with a book, which I have read with great pleaſure, intitled, *The Criterion; or, Miracles examined, with a View to expoſe the Pretenſions of Pagans and Papiſts; to compare the miraculous Powers recorded in the New Teſtament, with thoſe ſaid to ſubſiſt in latter Times; and to ſhew the great and material Difference between them in point of Evidence: from whence it will appear, that the former muſt be true, and the latter may be falſe.* The ſubject is evidently both curious and important, and is treated by the author, who, I hear, is the Rev. Mr. Douglaſs, in a judicious and maſterly way. It was publiſhed at London in 1754, and therefore before the publication of the ſecond volume of the *View of the Deiſtical Writers.* And if I had then ſeen it, I ſhould certainly have thought myſelf obliged to take particular notice of it. The worthy author has made judicious obſervations upon Mr. Hume's *Eſſay on Miracles*, eſpecially that part of it which relateth to the miracles aſcribed to the Abbé de Paris, which he has inſiſted on for an hundred pages together. And it is no ſmall ſatisfaction to me, that there is a perfect harmony between what this learned author has written on this ſubject, and what I have publiſhed in the preceding part of this work, though neither of us knew of the other's work. He ſhews, as I have endeavoured to do, that fraud and impoſture were plainly detected in ſeveral inſtances: and that where the facts were true, natural cauſes ſufficient to produce the effect may be aſſigned, without ſuppoſing any thing miraculous in the caſe. This he has particularly ſhewn, with regard to each of the miracles inſiſted on by Mr. de Montgeron, which he accounts for much in the ſame way that Mr. des Voeux hath more largely done, though he had not ſeen that gentleman's valuable writings, to which I have frequently referred for a fuller account of thoſe things, which I could do little more than hint

at. The reader will find in Mr. Douglaſs's work a full proof of the wonderful force of the imagination, and the mighty influence that ſtrong impreſſions made upon the mind, and vehement paſſions raiſed there, may have in producing ſurprizing changes on the body, and particularly in removing diſeaſes: of which he hath produced ſeveral well-atteſted inſtances, no leſs extraordinary than thoſe attributed to the Abbé de Paris, and which yet cannot reaſonably be pretended to be properly miraculous.

As I have thought myſelf obliged to take notice of that part of this gentleman's book, which hath ſo near a connection with the work in which I have been engaged; ſo it is but juſt to obſerve, that it is alſo, with regard to every other part of it, a learned and accurate performance.

What he propoſes to ſhew is, that the evidence for the goſpel facts is as extraordinary as the facts themſelves; and that no juſt ſuſpicion of fraud or falſehood appeareth in the accounts; while every thing is the reverſe, with regard to the evidence brought for the pagan or popiſh miracles.

He obſerves, that the extraordinary facts aſcribed to a miraculous interpoſition among the Pagans of old, or the Chriſtians of latter times, are all reducible to theſe two claſſes. The accounts are either ſuch as, from the circumſtances thereof, appear to be falſe; or, the facts are ſuch as, by the nature thereof, they do not appear to be miraculous. As to the firſt, the general rules he lays down, by which we may try the pretended miracles amongſt Pagans and Papiſts, and which may ſet forth the grounds on which we ſuppoſe them to be falſe, are theſe three: That either they were not publiſhed to the world till long after the time when they were ſaid to be performed: Or, they were not publiſhed in the places where it is pretended the facts were wrought, but were propagated only at a great diſtance from the ſcene of action: Or, they were ſuffered to paſs without due examination, becauſe they coincided with the favourite opinions and prejudices of thoſe to whom they were reported; or, becauſe the accounts were encouraged and ſupported by thoſe who alone had the power of detecting the fraud, and could prevent any examination, which might tend to undeceive the world. Theſe obſervations he applies to the pagan and popiſh miracles; ſome of the moſt remarkable of which he diſtinctly mentions, and ſhews, that there

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are none of them that do not labour under one or other of theſe defects.

After conſidering thoſe pretended miracles, which, from the circumſtances of the accounts given of them, appear to be falſe, he next proceedeth to thoſe works, which, though they may be true, and aſcribed by ignorance, art, or credulity, to ſupernatural cauſes, yet are really natural, and may be accounted for, without ſuppoſing any miraculous interpoſition; and here he enters on a large and particular diſcuſſion of the miracles attributed to the Abbé de Paris, and of ſome other miracles that have been much boaſted of in the Romiſh church.

Having fully examined and expoſed the pagan and popiſh miracles, he next proceeds to ſhew, that the objections made againſt them, and which adminiſter juſt grounds of ſuſpicion, cannot be urged againſt the goſpel miracles. And here he diſtinctly ſhews, Firſt, that the facts were ſuch that, from the nature of them, they muſt needs be miraculous, and cannot be accounted for in a natural way, or by any power of imagination, or ſtrong impreſſions made upon the mind; and, Secondly, that thoſe facts are ſuch as, from the circumſtances of them, they cannot be falſe. And to this purpoſe, he makes it appear, that they were publiſhed and appealed to at the time when they were performed, and were coeval with the preaching of Chriſtianity, which was manifeſtly founded upon them. They were alſo publiſhed and atteſted at the places where the ſcene of them was laid, and on the ſpot on which they were wrought: and the circumſtances, under which they were firſt publiſhed, give us an aſſurance, that they underwent a ſtrict examination, and conſequently that they could not have eſcaped detection, had they been impoſtures.

Mr. Douglaſs thinks it not ſufficient barely to prove, that the teſtimony for the goſpel-miracles is ſtronger than that which ſupporteth any other pretended miracles; he further ſhews, by a variety of conſiderations, that it is the ſtrongeſt that can be ſuppoſed, or that from the nature of the thing could be had. And then he proceeds to obſerve, that, beſides the unexceptionable proof from teſtimony, the credibility of the goſpel-miracles is confirmed to us, by collateral evidences of the moſt ſtriking nature, and which no ſpurious miracles can boaſt of: Such as, the great change that was thereby introduced into the ſtate of religion:

the proofs that God was with the firſt publiſhers of Chriſtianity, in other inſtances beſides thoſe of miracles, particularly in aſſiſting them ſupernaturally in the knowledge of the ſcheme of religion which they taught, and of which they were not capable of being the authors or inventors, and enabling them to give clear predictions of future events. And particularly he inſiſteth upon that moſt expreſs and circumſtantial prediction of the deſtruction of the city and temple of Jeruſalem, and the diſperſion of the Jewiſh nation, as a demonſtration that Jeſus acted under a ſupernatural influence. The laſt thing he urgeth as a collateral evidence is, that the miracles recorded in Scripture were performed by thoſe who aſſumed the character of prophets, or teachers ſent from God, and their miracles were intended as credentials to eſtabliſh their claim, to add authority to the meſſages they delivered, and the laws they taught—A character which, he ſhews, both the pagan and popiſh miracles are entirely deſtitute of.

This is a brief account of the plan of Mr. Douglaſs's work, which fully anſwereth the title: and it is with great pleaſure I take this opportunity to acknowledge the merit of the learned author, and the ſervice he hath done to the Chriſtian and Proteſtant cauſe.

I am, Sir, &c.

LETTER XXII.

Lord Bolingbroke's Poſthumous Works an inſolent Attempt upon Religion, natural and revealed—Not written according to the Laws of Method—His fair Profeſſions, and the advantageous Account he gives of his own Deſign—He exalteth himſelf above all that have written before him, Ancients and Moderns; blames the Free-thinkers for taking unbecoming Liberties; yet writes himſelf without any Regard to the Rules of Decency—His outrageous Invectives againſt the Holy Scriptures, particularly the Writings of Moſes and St. Paul—The ſevere Cenſures he paſſeth on the moſt celebrated Heathen Philoſophers—But, above all, the virulent and contemptuous Reproaches he caſteth upon Chriſtian Philoſophers and Divines—A general Account of his Scheme, and the main Principles to which it is reducible.

SIR,

THE account you gave me of the late pompous edition of the works of the late Lord Viſcount Bolingbroke in five large volumes 4to. made me very deſirous to ſee them. But it was ſome time after the publication of them, before I had an opportunity of gratifying my curioſity. I have now read them with ſome care and attention.

The works he had publiſhed in his own life-time, and which are republiſhed in this edition, had created a high opinion of the genius and abilities of the author. In them he had treated chiefly concerning matters of a political nature; and it were greatly to be wiſhed for his own reputation, and for the benefit of mankind, that he had confined himſelf to ſubjects of that kind, in that part of his works which he deſigned to be publiſhed after his deceaſe. Theſe his poſthumous works make by far the greater part of this collection. His *Letters on the Study and Uſe of Hiſtory*, which were publiſhed before the reſt, had prepared the world not to look for any thing from him, that was friendly to Chriſtianity or the holy Scriptures. But I am apt to think, that the extreme inſolence, the virulence and contempt with which in his other

poſthumous works he hath treated thoſe things that have been hitherto accounted moſt ſacred among Chriſtians, and the open attacks he hath made upon ſome important principles of natural religion itſelf, have exceeded whatever was expected or imagined. There is ground to apprehend, that the quality and reputation of the author, his high pretenſions to reaſon and freedom of thought, his great command of words, and the poſitive and dictatorial air he every-where aſſumes, may be apt to impoſe upon many readers, and may do miſchief in an age too well prepared already for receiving ſuch impreſſions. Upon theſe conſiderations, you have been pleaſed to think, that a diſtinct examination of this writer might help to furniſh a very proper ſupplement to the view which hath been taken of the deiſtical writers of the laſt and preſent century. I was, I muſt confeſs, not very fond of the employment: for what pleaſure could be propoſed in raking into ſuch a heap of materials, which are thrown together without much order, and among which one is ſure to meet with many things ſhocking to any man that has a juſt veneration for our holy religion, and who hath its honour and intereſts really at heart?

Before I enter on a diſtinct conſideration of what Lord Bolingbroke hath offered both againſt natural and revealed religion, I ſhall make ſome general obſervations on his ſpirit and deſign, and his manner of treating the ſubjects he has undertaken, which may help us to form a judgment of his character as a writer, and how far he is to be depended upon.

The manner of writing his Lordſhip hath generally choſen is by way of eſſay. He has been far from confining himſelf to the laws of method; and perhaps thought it beneath ſo great a genius to ſtoop to common rules. But there is certainly a medium between being too ſtiff and pedantic, and too looſe and negligent. He is ſenſible that he has not been very methodical, and ſeems to pleaſe himſelf in it. He declares, that "he does not obſerve "in theſe Eſſays, any more than he uſed to do in converſation, "a juſt proportion in the members of his diſcourſe*:" and that he has thrown his reflections upon paper as they "occurred to "his thoughts, and as the frequent interruptions to which he

* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. iii. p. 460.

"was

" was expoſed would give him leave*." He condeſcends to make a kind of apology for this way of writing, when he ſays, " I will endeavour not to be tedious; and this endeavour will " ſucceed the better perhaps by declining any over-ſtrict obſer- " vation of method†." But I am apt to think he would have been leſs tedious, and more enlightening to his reader, if he had been more obſervant of the rules of method. He might then have avoided many of thoſe repetitions and digreſſions, which ſo frequently recur in theſe Eſſays, and which, notwithſtanding all the advantages of his ſtyle, and the vivacity of his imagination, often prove, if I may judge of others by myſelf, very diſagreeable and irkſome to the reader.

As to his deſign in theſe writings, if we are to take his own word for it, very great advantage might be expected from them to mankind. He believes " few men have conſulted others, both " the living and the dead, with leſs precipitation, and in a great- " er ſpirit of docility, than he has done: He diſtruſted himſelf, " not his teachers, men of the greateſt name, ancient and modern. " But he found at laſt, that it was ſafer to truſt himſelf than " them, and to proceed by the light of his own underſtanding, than " to wander after thoſe *ignes fatui* of philoſophy‡." He is ſenſible that " it is the modeſt, not the preſumptuous inquirer, who " makes a real and ſafe progreſs in the diſcovery of divine truth §; and that " candour and knowledge are qualifications which " ſhould always go together, and are inſeparable from the love of " truth, and promote one another in the diſcovery of it‖." He contents himſelf to be " governed by the dictates of nature, and " is therefore in no danger of becoming atheiſtical, ſuperſtitious, " or ſceptical**."

In his introduction to his Eſſays, in a letter to Mr. Pope, he gives a moſt pompous account of his intentions, and evidently raiſeth himſelf above the greateſt men, ancient and modern. He " repreſents metaphyſical divines and philoſophers, as having be- " wildered themſelves, and a great part of mankind, in ſuch inex- " tricable labyrinths of hypothetical reaſonings, that few can find

* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. iii. p. 556.
† Ibid. p. 318.
‡ Ibid. p. 320.
§ Ibid. p. 344.
‖ Ibid. p. 494.
** Ibid. vol. v. p. 492.

" their

"their way back, and none can find it forward into the road of "truth*." He declares that "natural theology, and natural re- "ligion, have been corrupted to such a degree, that it is grown, "and was long since, as necessary to plead the cause of God "against the divine as against the atheist; to assert his existence "against the latter, to defend his attributes against the former, "and to justify his providence against both †." That "truth and "falsehood, knowledge and ignorance, revelations of the Creator, "inventions of the creature, dictates of reason, sallies of enthu- "siasm, have been blended so long together in systems of theology, "that it may be thought dangerous to separate them‡." And he seems to think this was a task reserved for him. He proposes "to distinguish genuine and pure theism from the prophane mix- "tures of human imagination; and to go to the root of that er- "ror which encourages our curiosity, sustains our pride, forti- "fies our prejudices, and gives pretence to delusion; to discover "the true nature of human knowledge, how far it extends, how "far it is real, and where and how it begins to be fantastical §;" "that the gaudy visions of error being dispelled, men may be ac- "customed to the simplicity of truth." For this he expects to be "treated with scorn and contempt by the whole theological "and metaphysical tribe, and railed at as an infidel ‖." But "lay- "ing aside all the immense volumes of fathers and councils, "schoolmen, casuists, and controversial writers, he is determin- "ed to seek for genuine Christianity with that simplicity of spirit "with which it is taught in the gospel by Christ himself**." The guides he proposes to follow are, "the works and the word "of God††." And he declares, that "for himself he thought it "much better not to write at all, than to write under any restraint "from delivering the whole truth of things as it appeared to "him‡‡."

But though he thus professes an impartial love of truth, and to deliver his sentiments with freedom, yet he seems resolved, where he happens to differ from the received opinion, not to shew a de- cent regard to the established religion of his country. He praiseth

* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. iii. p. 327.
† Ibid. p. 327, 328.
‡ Ibid. p. 331.
§ Ibid. p. 328.
‖ Ibid. p. 330.
** Ibid p. 339.
†† Ibid. p. 347.
‡‡ Ibid. vol. iv. p. 54.

Scævola

Scævola and Varro, who, he ſays, "both thought that things "evidently falſe might deſerve an outward reſpect, when they "are interwoven with a ſyſtem of government. This outward "reſpect every good ſubject will ſhew them in ſuch a caſe. He "will not propagate thoſe errors, but he will be cautious how he "propagates even truth in oppoſition to them*." He blames not only that arbitrary *tyrannical ſpirit* that puts *on the maſk of religious zeal*, but that *preſumptuous factious ſpirit* that has appeared *under the maſk of liberty*; and which, if it ſhould prevail, *would deſtroy at once the general influence of religion, by ſhaking the foundations of it which education had laid.* But he thinks, "there is a middle way between theſe extremes, in which a rea-"ſonable man and a good citizen may direct his ſteps †." It is to be preſumed therefore, that he would have it thought that this is the way he himſelf hath taken. He mentions with approbation the maxims of the Soufys, a ſect of philoſophers in Perſia: one of which is: "If you find no reaſon to doubt concerning the opi-"nions of your fathers, keep to them, they will be ſufficient for "you. If you find any reaſon to doubt concerning them, ſeek "the truth quietly, but take care not to diſturb the minds of "other men." He profeſſeth to proceed by theſe rules, and blameth ſome who are called Free-thinkers for imagining, that as "every man has a right to think and judge for himſelf, he has "therefore a right of ſpeaking according to the full freedom of "his thoughts. The freedom belongs to him as a rational crea-"ture: He lies under the reſtraint as a member of ſociety ‡."

But notwithſtanding theſe fair profeſſions, perhaps there ſcarce ever was an author who had leſs regard to the rules of decency in writing than Lord Bolingbroke. The holy Scriptures are received with great veneration among Chriſtians; and the religion there taught is the religion publicly profeſſed and eſtabliſhed in theſe nations; and therefore, according to his own rule, ought to be treated with a proper reſpect. And yet on many occaſions he throws out the moſt outrageous abuſe againſt thoſe ſacred writings, and the authors of them. He compares the hiſtory of the Pentateuch to the romances Don Quixote was ſo fond of;

* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. iii. p. 331. † Ibid. p. 332.
‡ Ibid. p. 333, 334.

and

and pronounces that they who receive them as authentic are not much leſs mad than he*. That "it is no leſs than blaſphemy to "aſſert the Jewiſh Scriptures to have been divinely inſpired;" and he repreſents thoſe that attempt to juſtify them as having "ill hearts as well as heads, and as worſe than atheiſts, though "they may paſs for ſaints†." He chargeth thoſe with impiety, "who would impoſe on us, as the word of God, a book which "contains ſcarce any thing that is not repugnant to the wiſdom, "power, and other attributes of a Supreme All-perfect Being‡." And he roundly pronounceth, that "there are groſs defects and "palpable falſehoods in almoſt every page of the Scriptures, and "the whole tenor of them is ſuch, as no man, who acknowledges "a Supreme All-perfect Being, can believe to be his word§." This is a brief ſpecimen of his invectives againſt the ſacred writings of the Old Teſtament, and which he repeateth on many occaſions. He affecteth indeed to ſpeak with ſeeming reſpect of Chriſtianity, yet he has not only endeavoured to invalidate the evidences that are brought to ſupport it, but he paſſeth the ſevereſt cenſures upon doctrines which he himſelf repreſenteth as original and eſſential doctrines of the Chriſtian religion. He makes the moſt injurious repreſentation of the doctrine of our redemption by the blood of Chriſt, and chargeth it as repugnant to all our ideas of order, of juſtice, of goodneſs, and even of theiſm‖. And after a moſt virulent invective againſt the Jewiſh notion of God, as partial, cruel, arbitrary, and unjuſt, he aſſerts, that the character imputed to him by the Chriſtian doctrine of redemption, and future puniſhments, is as bad or worſe**. Great is the contempt and reproach he hath poured forth upon St. Paul, who was the penman of a conſiderable part of the New Teſtament, and whoſe name and writings have been always deſervedly had in great veneration in the Chriſtian church. He chargeth him with diſſimulation and falſehood, and even with madneſs††. He aſſerts that his goſpel was different from that of Chriſt, and contradictory to it‡‡; that he writes confuſedly, obſcurely, and

* Bolingbroke's Works, vol iii. p. 280.
† Ibid. p. 299. 306.
‡ Ibid. p. 308.
§ Ibid. p. 298.
‖ Ibid. vol. iv. p. 318. vol. v. p. 291, 532.
** Ibid. p. 532, 533.
†† Ibid. vol. iv. p. 172. 306.
‡‡ Ibid. p. 313. 327, 328.

unintelligibly;

unintelligibly;—and where his gospel is intelligible, it is often absurd, profane, and trifling*.

Some of those gentlemen who have shewn little respect for the holy Scriptures, have yet spoke with admiration of many of the sages of antiquity: but Lord Bolingbroke has on all occasions treated the greatest men of all ages with the utmost contempt and scorn. It is allowable indeed for sincere and impartial inquirers after truth, to differ from persons of high reputation for knowledge and learning, ancient and modern: and sometimes it is the more necessary to point out their errors, lest the authority of great names should lead men aside from truth. But whilst we think ourselves obliged to detect their mistakes, there is a decent regard to be paid them: it would be wrong to treat them in a reproachful and contemptuous manner. Yet this is what our author hath done. If all the passages were laid together, in which he hath inveighed against the wisest and most learned men of all ages, especially the philosophers, metaphysicians, and divines, they would fill no small volume. And indeed these kind of declamatory invectives recur so often in these Essays, as cannot but create great disgust to every reader of taste. I shall mention a few passages out of a multitude that might be produced, and which may serve as a sample of the rest. He saith of the philosophers, that "they seem to acquire knowledge only as a necessary step to error, and grow so fond of the latter, that they "esteem it no longer human, but raise it by an imaginary apo-"theosis up to a divine science: That these searchers after truth, "these lovers of wisdom, are nothing better than venders of false "wares: And the most irrational of all proceedings pass for the "utmost efforts of human reason†." He represents metaphysical divines and philosophers as having "wandered many thou-"sand years in imaginary light and darkness‡." He frequently chargeth them with *madness*, and sometimes with *blasphemy*; and that they "staggered about, and jostled one another in their "dreams§." Speaking of Plato and Aristotle, he says, "their "works have been preserved, perhaps more to the detriment than "to the advancement of learning‖." And though he sometimes

* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. iii. p. 330, 331. † Ibid. vol. iii. p. 490.
‡ Ibid. vol. iv. p. 8. § Ibid. vol. iii. p. 553, 554. vol. iv. p. 129. 150.
‖ Ibid. vol. iii. p. 392.

commends

commends Socrates, he pronounces, that he "ſubſtituted fan-"taſtical ideas inſtead of real knowledge, and corrupted ſcience "to the very ſource:" That "he loſt himſelf in the clouds—"when he declared, that the two offices of philoſophy are, the "contemplation of God, and the abſtracting of the ſoul from "corporeal ſenſe:" And that he and Plato were mad enough to think themſelves capable of ſuch contemplation and ſuch abſtraction*. Beſides many occaſional paſſages ſcattered throughout theſe Eſſays, there are ſeveral large ſections which contain almoſt nothing elſe than invectives againſt Plato and his philoſophy. He ſays, that philoſopher "treated every ſubject, whether cor-"poreal or intellectual, like a bombaſt poet, and a mad theolo-"gian†:" That "he who reads Plato's works like a man in his "ſenſes, will be tempted to think on many occaſions that the "author was not ſo:" And that "no man ever dreamed ſo wild-"ly as this author wrote‡." He chargeth him with a "falſe "ſublime in ſtyle, and that no writer can ſink lower than he "into a tedious ſocratical irony, into certain flimſy hypothetical "reaſonings that prove nothing, and into alluſions that are mere "vulgariſms, and that neither explain nor inforce any thing "that wants to be explained or inforced§." He repreſents all the commentators and *tranſlators* of Plato as *dull* or *mad;* and calls Ficinus *delirious*, and Dacier *ſimple* and a *bigot*, and a *Platonic madman*‖. The true reaſon of the particular diſlike he every-where expreſſes againſt that philoſopher ſeems to be what he calls his "rambling ſpeculations about the divine and "ſpiritual nature, about immaterial ſubſtances, about the immor-"tality of the ſoul, and about the rewards and puniſhments of a "future ſtate**."

As to the Stoics, he declares, "that their theology and morality "were alike abſurd:" That, in endeavouring to account how it came that there is evil in the world, and that the beſt men have often the greateſt ſhare of this evil, "they talked mere nonſenſe, "figurative, ſublime, metaphyſical, but nonſenſe ſtill††." The ancient *theiſts* in general he repreſents as having been ſeduced

* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. iv. p. 113.
† Ibid. p. 129.
‡ Ibid. p. 344. 357.
§ Ibid. p. 140, 141. 353, 354.
‖ Ibid. p. 107. 140. 355.
** Ibid. p. 347, 348.
†† Ibid. vol. v. p. 247. 317.

many ways into a confederacy with the atheiſts, and particularly blames them for pretending to connect moral attributes, ſuch as we conceive them, with the phyſical attributes of God; which, he affirms, gave great advantage to the objections of the atheiſts *.

But there is no ſort of men againſt whom he inveighs with greater licence of reproach than the Chriſtian divines and philoſophers. He frequently ſpeaks of the ancient fathers with the utmoſt contempt: That they were ſuperſtitious, credulous, lying men;—and that "the greateſt of them were unfit to write "or ſpeak on any ſubject that required cloſeneſs of reaſoning, "an evangelical candour, and even common ingenuouſneſs †." As to the more modern divines, he takes every occaſion of inſulting and abuſing them. Not only doth he repreſent them as "declaimers who have little reſpect for their readers,—as hired "to defend the Chriſtian ſyſtem,—and as ſeeking nothing more "than the honour of the gown, by having the laſt word in every "diſpute ‡;" but he ſays, "they talk a great deal of blaſphemy "on the head of internal divine characters of Scripture §." He often repeats it, that *atheiſts deny God*, but the *divines defame him*, which, he thinks, is the *worſe of the two*. He charges them with *madneſs*, and *worſe than madneſs* ‖: That "they have "recourſe to trifling diſtinctions, and dogmatical affirmations, "the laſt retrenchments of obſtinacy **:" That "of all fools, the "moſt preſumptuous, and at the ſame time moſt trifling, are "metaphyſical philoſophers and divines ††." He charges them, in an addreſs he makes to God, with "owning his exiſtence only "to cenſure his works, and the diſpenſations of his provi-"dence ‡‡." And frequently repreſents them as in *alliance with the atheiſts*, as *betraying the cauſe of God* to them, and as doing *their beſt, in concert with theſe their allies*, to deſtroy both the *goodneſs* and *juſtice* of God §§. He declares, that "he who fol-"lows them cannot avoid preſumption and profaneneſs, and "muſt be much upon his guard to avoid blaſphemy ‖‖:" "That

* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. v. p. 316.
† Ibid. vol. iii. p. 337, 338. vol. iv. p. 586.
‡ Ibid. p. 290. vol. v. p. 286. 314.
‖ Ibid. vol. iv. p. 273.
†† Ibid. p. 493.
§§ Ibid. p. 341. 346. 393, &c.
§ Ibid. vol. iii. p. 272.
** Ibid. vol. v. p. 188.
‡‡ Ibid. p. 339.
‖‖ Ibid. p. 464.

"the

" the preachers of natural and revealed religion have been loudeſt " in their clamours againſt Providence, and have done nothing " more than repeat what the atheiſts have ſaid;—and that they " attempt to prove that the Supreme Being is the tyrant of the " world he governs*." And the ſame charge he advanceth againſt the Chriſtian philoſophers in general.

But beſides theſe general invectives againſt Chriſtian philoſophers and divines, he hath particularly attacked ſome of the moſt celebrated names in a manner little reconcileable to good manners, and the decency which ought to be obſerved towards perſons of diſtinguiſhed reputation, even when we think them in the wrong. Speaking of " many reverend perſons, who," he ſays, " have had their heads turned by a preternatural fermentation " of the brain, or a philoſophical delirium,"—he obſerves, that " none has been more ſo than Dr. Cudworth.—He read too " much to think enough." He repreſents him as having " given " a nonſenſical paraphraſe of nonſenſe;"—and that " the good " man paſſed his life in the ſtudy of an unmeaning jargon: and " as he learned, ſo he taught†." He charges Biſhop Cumberland with " metaphyſical jargon, and theological blaſphemy ‡." Stillingfleet is ſpoken of with contempt; as alſo Huet, Bochart, and the Chriſtian antiquaries§. Nor is archbiſhop Tillotſon treated with greater regard. He talks in a very ſlighting way of thoſe that have written on the law of nature, particularly Grotius, Selden, and Puffendorf: That they " puzzle and perplex the " plaineſt thing in the world, and ſeem to be great writers on " this ſubject, by much the ſame right as he might be called a " great traveller, who ſhould go from London to Paris by the " Cape of Good Hope‖." There is none of the Chriſtian philoſophers of whom he ſpeaks with ſo much reſpect as Mr. Locke; yet he repreſents him as having " dreamed that he had a power " of forming abſtract ideas;" and mentions this as a proof, that " there is ſuch a thing as a philoſophical delirium**." And he charges it upon him as a great inconſiſtency, that he ſhould write a Commentary on St. Paul's Epiſtles, and a Diſcourſe on the

* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. v. p. 484, 485.
† Ibid. vol. iii. p. 353. vol. iv. p. 92.
‡ Ibid. vol. v. p. 82.
§ Ibid. vol. iii. p. 264. vol iv. p. 13.
‖ Ibid. vol. v. p. 68.
** Ibid. vol. ii. p. 441, 442.

Reaſonableneſs

Reaſonableneſs of Chriſtianity, after he had written an Eſſay on Human Underſtanding*.

But there is no one perſon whom he treats with ſo much rudeneſs and inſolence as the late eminently learned Dr. Samuel Clarke. He calls him a preſumptuous dogmatiſt, and repreſents him as having "impiouſly advanced, that we know the rule God "governs by as well as he;—and that, like another Eunomius, "he preſumes to know God, his moral nature at leaſt, and to "teach others to know him, as well as he knows himſelf†." He chargeth him with a *fooliſh and wicked rhodomontade*, "with "pretending to make infallible demonſtrations, like the Pope's "decrees, and ſending every one to the devil who does not be-"lieve in them‡: and with a rhapſody of preſumptuous reaſon-"ings, of prophane abſurdities, of evaſions that ſeem to anſwer "while they only perplex, and in one word, the moſt arbitrary "and leaſt reaſonable ſuppoſitions§." He ſaith, that "the re-"trenchments caſt up by him are feeble beyond belief." That "he boaſts like a bully, who looks fierce, ſpeaks big, and is "little to be feared‖." Not only does he call him an *audacious and vain ſophiſt***, but he carries it ſo far as to ſay, that "he "and Wollaſton do in effect renounce God, as much as the "rankeſt of the atheiſtical tribe††. With regard to the laſt mentioned celebrated writer, Mr. Wollaſton, beſides the ſevere reproach caſt upon him in the paſſage I have juſt cited, Lord Bolingbroke elſewhere treats him as "a licentious maker of hypo-"theſes—and a whining philoſopher." He repreſents all that he hath ſaid about the immortality of the ſoul "as a ſtring of "arbitrary ſuppoſitions;" and that "his diſcourſe on that ſub-"ject is ſuch as would lead one to think, that the philoſopher "who held it was a patient of Dr. Monro's not yet perfectly "reſtored to his ſenſes‡‡. He acknowledges him indeed to have been a man of *parts and learning*, but charges him with *writing nonſenſe;* that he, and ſuch as he, were *learned lunatics;* and he treats his way of arguing about a future ſtate, as a *ſpecimen of*

* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. iv. p. 166. 295.
† Ibid. vol. iii. p. 52. vol. v. p. 449.
‡ Ibid. p. 252.
§ Ibid. p. 292.
‖ Ibid. p. 280. 293.
** Ibid. p. 293.
†† Ibid. p. 484, 485.
‡‡ Ibid. vol. iii. p. 515. 518. vol. v. p. 388.

that ſort of madneſs which is called a *dementia quoad hoc**. The ſame cenſure he paſſeth on the late Lord Preſident of Scotland, "that he was indeed a man of capacity, good ſenſe, and know-"ledge, but was in a *delirium*, and *mad, quoad hoc*, when he wrote "againſt Tindal†."

You cannot but have obſerved, in reading over ſeveral of the paſſages which have been produced, that it is familiar with Lord Bolingbroke to repreſent thoſe as mad and out of their ſenſes who happen to differ from him, at leaſt as mad with regard to the particular point in difference. I ſhall only mention one paſſage more to this purpoſe out of the many that might be produced. Having compared the reaſoners *a priori* to perſons in *Bedlam*, and the ſeveral ſorts of madmen there, he adds, that "atheiſts are one ſort "of madmen, many divines and theiſts another ſort;"—and that "theſe ſorts of madmen are principally to be found in colleges "and ſchools, where different ſects have rendered this ſort of mad-"neſs, which is occaſionally elſewhere, both epidemical and tra-"ditional‡." If one were to imitate this author's manner of talking, one might be apt to charge him as being ſeized with a ſort of madneſs, when certain ſubjects come in his way—metaphyſics; artificial theology; Plato and Platonic philoſophy; ſpiritual ſubſtance, and incorporeal eſſence; but, above all, the Chriſtian divines and clergy. Theſe, when he happens to meet with them, bring one of his fits upon him, and often ſet him a-raving for ſeveral pages together. But I confeſs I too much diſlike ſuch a way of writing to make recriminations of this kind. And yet his lordſhip tells the divines of the *diſcretion of their adverſaries*, and would have them *return it with diſcretion*. And he repreſents the *orthodox bullies*, as he calls them, as "affecting to tri-"umph over men, who employ but part of their ſtrength, as tiring "them with impertinent paradoxes, and provoking them with un-"juſt reflections, and often by the foulеſt language§."

I am apt to think, that by this time you are weary of reading over ſuch a heap of abuſive reflections, ſo unbecoming any man of learning and education, much more one ſo converſant in the polite world as Lord Bolingbroke has been. The tranſcribing

* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. v. p. 474.
† Ibid. p. 523.
‡ Ibid. p. 369, 370.
§ Ibid. vol. iii. p. 272, 273.

them

them out of his Eſſays was no very agreeable employment. But they ſo often occur there, and make ſo remarkable a part of the works of this right honourable author, that it was abſolutely neceſſary to take ſome notice of them. One thing may be ſafely collected from his writing after this manner, *viz.* that he had a very high opinion of the ſuperiority of his own underſtanding, and a ſovereign contempt for all thoſe that were in different ſentiments from him, whether philoſophers, ancient or modern, or divines, but eſpecially for the latter.

If we examine what foundation there is for theſe high pretenſions, or what new and important diſcoveries this writer hath made in religion or philoſophy, which may be of real uſe to mankind, the principal things in his ſcheme may be reduced to the following heads:

1. That there is one Supreme All-perfect Being, the eternal and original cauſe of all things, of almighty power and infinite wiſdom; but that we muſt not pretend to aſcribe to him any moral attributes, diſtinct from his phyſical, eſpecially holineſs, juſtice, and goodneſs: that he has not theſe attributes, according to the ideas we conceive of them, nor any thing equivalent to thoſe qualities as they are in us; and that to pretend to deduce moral obligations from thoſe attributes, or to talk of imitating God in his moral attributes, is enthuſiaſm or blaſphemy.

2. That God made the world, and eſtabliſhed the laws of this ſyſtem at the beginning: but that he doth not now concern himſelf in the affairs of men, or that if he doth, his providence only extendeth to collective bodies, but hath no regard to individuals, to their actions, or to the events that befal them.

3. That the ſoul is not a diſtinct ſubſtance from the body: that the whole man is diſſolved at death: and that though it may be uſeful to mankind to believe the doctrine of future rewards and puniſhments, yet it is a fiction, which hath no real foundation in nature and reaſon: and that to pretend to argue for future retributions from the apprehended unequal diſtributions of this preſent ſtate, is abſurd and blaſphemous, and is to caſt the moſt unworthy reflections on divine Providence.

4. That the law of nature is what reaſon diſcovereth to us concerning our duty as founded in the human ſyſtem: that it is clear and obvious to all mankind; but has been obſcured and perverted

by ancient philoſophers and modern divines: that it has not been ſet in a proper light by thoſe who have undertaken to treat of it; and therefore he hath repreſented it in its genuine purity and ſimplicity: and that the ſanctions of that law relate to men not individually, but collectively conſidered.

5. That from the clearneſs and ſufficiency of the law of nature, it may be concluded, that God hath made no other revelation of his will to mankind: and that there is no need or uſe for any extraordinary ſupernatural revelation.

6. That it is profane and blaſphemous to aſcribe the Jewiſh Scriptures to revelation or inſpiration from God: that the hiſtory contained there is falſe and incredible, and the ſcheme of religion taught in thoſe writings is abſolutely unworthy of God, and repugnant to his divine perfections.

7. That the New Teſtament conſiſts of two different goſpels, oppoſite to one another, that of Chriſt and that of St. Paul: that Chriſtianity in its genuine ſimplicity, as taught by Jeſus Chriſt, and contained in the evangelical writings, is a benevolent inſtitution, and may be regarded as a republication of the law of nature, or rather of the theology of Plato: that the morals it teaches are pure, but no other than the philoſophers had taught before, and that ſome of its precepts are not agreeable to the natural law; and ſome of its original doctrines, particularly thoſe relating to the redemption of mankind by the death of Chriſt, and to future rewards and puniſhments, are abſurd, and inconſiſtent with the attributes of God.

Theſe appear to me to be the moſt remarkable things in the late Lord Bolingbroke's *Poſthumous Works*, as far as natural and revealed religion is concerned. And the method I propoſe to purſue in my obſervations upon them is this:

I ſhall firſt conſider the attempts he hath made to ſubvert the main principles that lie at the foundation of all religion, *viz.* thoſe relating to the moral attributes of God, a particular providence extending to the individuals of the human race, the immortality of the ſoul, and a future ſtate of retributions. I ſhall next examine the account he hath given of the law of nature, and of the duties and ſanctions of that law. After which it will be proper to conſider what he hath offered concerning divine revelation in general, with a view to ſhew that an extraordinary revelation

lation of the will of God to mankind is abſolutely needleſs, and that therefore we may conclude, that God hath never given ſuch a revelation at all. I ſhall proceed, in the next place, to a particular and diſtinct examination of the objections he hath urged againſt the truth and divine original of the Moſaic revelation, and the Scriptures of the Old Teſtament; and ſhall conclude with conſidering what more directly relateth to the Chriſtian revelation properly ſo called, to its proofs and evidences, and to its laws and doctrines, all which he hath endeavoured to expoſe.

This I hope may be ſufficient to anſwer the deſign I have in view, which is to obviate the principal miſchiefs to religion, which Lord Bolingbroke's Works ſeem fitted to produce. Other things there are in theſe volumes, which might furniſh matter for many reflections, but which I ſhall take little or no notice of, as they do not come within the compaſs of the plan I propoſe.

I am, &c.

LETTER XXIII.

Lord Bolingbroke aſſerts the Exiſtence of God againſt the Atheiſts, but rejects the Argument a priori, *and that drawn from the general Conſent of Mankind—He is for reducing all the divine Attributes to Wiſdom and Power, and blames the Divines for diſtinguiſhing between the phyſical and moral Attributes—He aſſerts, that we cannot aſcribe Goodneſs and Juſtice to God, according to our Ideas of them, nor argue with any Certainty about them—That it is abſurd to deduce moral Obligations from the moral Attributes of God, or to pretend to imitate him in thoſe Attributes—Obſervations upon his Scheme—It is ſhewn, that the moral Attributes are neceſſarily included in the Idea of the abſolutely perfect Being—The Author's Objections againſt aſcribing thoſe Attributes to God, or diſtinguiſhing them from his phyſical Attributes, particularly conſidered—His manifold Inconſiſtencies and Contradictions.*

SIR,

IN my laſt a general account was given of the ſcheme Lord Bolingbroke ſeems to have had in view in his Poſthumous Works, and of the main principles to which it is reducible. I now proceed to a more diſtinct examination of thoſe principles; and ſhall begin with that which lieth at the foundation of all religion, the exiſtence and attributes of God. And it muſt be acknowledged, that his Lordſhip every-where in the ſtrongeſt terms aſſerteth the exiſtence of the one Supreme All-perfect Being, the Great Author of the univerſe. He repreſents this as *ſtrictly demonſtrable*, and treats the opinion of the atheiſts as *infinitely abſurd;* and that they can *only cavil*, but *cannot reaſon*, againſt the exiſtence of the firſt cauſe; of which, he thinks, we may be in reaſon as ſure as of our own exiſtence. There are ſeveral paſſages in his works, in which he expreſſeth himſelf devoutly with regard to the Supreme Being, and profeſſeth ſeriouſly to adore him. And there are ſome inſtances of his addreſſing him with great ſolemnity, and in a religious manner *.

* See particularly vol. iii. p. 247. 358. vol. v. p. 338, &c.

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I need not take any notice of what he hath briefly offered for demonſtrating the exiſtence of a Deity*. He has ſaid nothing on this head, but what has been frequently urged to great advantage by others before him; and particularly by Dr. Clarke, in what his Lordſhip is pleaſed to call his *pretended demonſtration of the being and attributes of God*†.

Our author indeed is for confining the proof to the argument *a poſteriori*, and is for abſolutely rejecting the argument *a priori*, whereas Dr. Clarke inſiſts upon both: and I cannot help thinking that both may be highly uſeful; and that they are then moſt effectual, and come with the greateſt force, when they come in aid of one another.

As Lord Bolingbroke rejects the argument *a priori* for the exiſtence and perfections of God, ſo he ſeems not willing to allow that which is drawn from the general conſent of mankind. He ſays, it will indeed prove, that men generally believed a God, but not that ſuch a Being exiſts; and he repreſents it as *trifling* to *inſiſt upon it*‡. And in a letter occaſioned by one of Archbiſhop Tillotſon's ſermons, vol. iii. p. 257, *& ſeq.* he finds fault with that great divine for making uſe of that argument, and diſingenuouſly repreſents it, as if he had reſted the proof of a Deity principally upon it§; which he is far from doing, though it muſt be acknowledged to be a conſideration of great weight. He particularly blames the Archbiſhop for aſcribing this conſent to the nature of the human mind, on which God has impreſſed an innate idea of himſelf; but he owns, that afterwards he ſoftens it by ſaying, that "the human mind is ſo diſpoſed, that men "may diſcover, in the due uſe of its faculties, that there is a "God‖." And he ſpeaks of ſome divines who explain it thus: that the belief of God is founded on a certain natural proportion there is between this great truth and the conceptions of the human mind. But our author thinks, that "ſuch a *natural and in-* "*timate proportion* between the exiſtence of God, and the con- "ceptions of the human mind, may appear chimerical, and per- "haps is ſo**;" and obſerves, that "polytheiſm was more con-

* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. iii. p. 353, 354.
† Ibid. p. 52.
‡ Ibid. p. 247.
§ Ibid. p. 258. 267.
‖ Ibid. p. 258.
** Ibid. p. 259, 260.

" formable to the natural conceptions of the human mind, eſpe-
" cially in the moſt ancient and ignorant ages, than the belief
" of One firſt intelligent Cauſe, the ſole Creator, Preſerver, and
" Governor of all things." Yet he afterwards declares, that " the idea of an All-wiſe and All-powerful Being, the firſt cauſe " of all things, is ſo *proportionable to human reaſon*, that it muſt " have been received into the minds of men, as ſoon as they be-
" gan to contemplate the face of nature, and to exerciſe their
" reaſon in ſuch contemplations*." And in his reflections on M. Maupertuis, who had ſlighted the argument from the general conſent of mankind, he obſerves, that " it is general enough to " ſhew *the proportion which this truth bears to the univerſal* " *reaſon of mankind*†." You cannot but obſerve here, that he directly makes uſe of that manner of expreſſion which he had before blamed others for uſing.

But it will be proper more diſtinctly to inquire into the idea this writer gives of God, and of the divine perfections. The only attributes of God which he inſiſteth upon as neceſſary to be known by us are, his power and wiſdom. We riſe," ſays he, " from a knowledge of ourſelves, and of the works of God, to " a knowledge of his exiſtence, and his *wiſdom* and *power*, which " we call infinite‡." He blames thoſe who preſume to define the moral attributes of an All-perfect Being; and thinks " we " ought to content ourſelves to know that he exiſts by the ne-
" ceſſity of his nature, and that his *wiſdom* and *power* are infi-
" nite§." He declares, that " a ſelf-exiſtent Being, the firſt " Cauſe of all things, infinitely *powerful* and infinitely *wiſe*, is " the God of natural theology: that as the whole ſyſtem of the " univerſe bears witneſs to this truth, ſo the whole ſyſtem of na-
" tural religion reſts on it, and requires no broader foundation.
" Theſe ſyſtems are God's ſyſtems‖." We ſee here there is no mention made of the divine goodneſs, as included in the idea we form of a deity. Natural theology, or natural religion, requires no broader a foundation than the acknowledging the wiſdom and power of God. And ſo it generally is in the account our author gives of God and his attributes; as if *optimus* were not to

* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. iv. p. 195. † Ibid. p. 256.
‡ Ibid. p. 88. § Ibid. vol. v. p. 235. ‖ Ibid. p. 316.

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be joined with *maximus* in the deiſt's creed, or in the idea natural religion teaches us to form of God. And accordingly he finds fault with what he calls *artificial theology*, for pretending "to connect moral attributes, ſuch as we conceive them, and "ſuch as they are relatively to us, with the phyſical attributes "of God." He ſays, "there is no ſufficient foundation for "this proceeding in the phænomena of nature, and that in ſeveral "caſes they are repugnant." And he expreſsly mentions it among the wrong notions of the ancient theiſts, and which gave advantage to the atheiſts with regard to the queſtion about the original of evil, that they maintained, that "God is juſt and "good, and righteous, and holy, as well as powerful and wiſe." He blames them for ſaying, that "love was the firſt principle of "things, and that it determined God to bring forth his creatures "into exiſtence*;" and that, as Seneca ſays, *uſque ad delicias amamur*. And elſewhere quoting a paſſage of Dr. Clarke, in which God is repreſented as having a *tender and hearty concern for the happineſs of man*, he ſays, "theſe are ſtrange words to "be applied to the Supreme Being†." And he argueth at great length againſt thoſe who ſuppoſe, that God made man only to be happy.

He frequently cenſureth the divines for diſtinguiſhing between God's phyſical and moral attributes; and "cannot ſee one reli-"gious purpoſe, that this diſtinction is neceſſary to anſwer‡. "God's moral attributes," he ſays, "can only be diſcerned in "the works of God, and in the conduct of his providence: and "that it is evident, they are not, cannot be ſo diſcerned in them, "as to be the object of our imitation§." He repreſents it as great preſumption to pretend to deduce our moral obligations from the moral attributes of God; and that the abſurdity of this cannot be too often expoſed‖. And after having aſſerted, that we cannot riſe from our moral obligations to God's ſuppoſed moral attributes, he adds, that "he calls them *ſuppoſed*, becauſe "after all that has been ſuppoſed to prove a neceſſary connec-"tion between his phyſical and moral attributes, we may obſerve

* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. v. p. 316, 317.
† Ibid. p. 63.
‡ Ibid. p. 62.
§ Ibid. p. 63.
‖ Ibid. p. 87.

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" them in his wiſdom;—and that the effects of his wiſdom give " us ſometimes ideas of thoſe moral qualities, which we acquire " by reflections on ourſelves, and ſometimes not*." He thinks the divines are to be blamed, " for talking of God's infinite good- " neſs and juſtice, as of his infinite wiſdom and power†;" and obſerves, that " every thing ſhews the wiſdom and power " of God, conformably to our ideas of wiſdom and power, in " the phyſical world and in the moral: but every thing does not " ſhew in like manner the juſtice and goodneſs of God, con- " formably to our ideas of thoſe attributes in either‡." That " though the wiſdom of God does not appear alike in all the " phænomena, yet, as far as we can diſcover, it appears in the " greateſt and leaſt to our aſtoniſhment, and none of them can be " ſtrained into a repugnancy to it: but the ſame cannot be ſaid " of the moral attributes which we aſcribe to the Supreme Being, " according to our ideas of them. It cannot be diſputed, and " all ſides agree, that many of the phænomena are repugnant to " our ideas of goodneſs and juſtice§." He declares it as his opinion, that " God's natural attributes abſorb the moral‖;" and particularly, that " the moral attributes of the Supreme " Being are abſorbed in his wiſdom; and that we ſhould con- " ſider them only as different modifications of his phyſical attri- " butes; and muſt always talk precariouſly and impertinently, " when we preſume to apply our ideas of them to the appear- " ances of things**." And he chargeth the divines " as pro- " ceeding in all their reaſonings about the nature, moral attri- " butes, and will of God, not only without regard to the phæ- " nomena, but often in direct contradiction to them††."

This is not a matter that he treats merely in ſome occaſional paſſages. The chief deſign of ſeveral of his fragments and eſſays in his fifth volume, particularly of the fourth, ſeventh, fortieth, forty-firſt, and forty-ninth, is to argue againſt thoſe who aſſert the moral attributes of God as diſtinguiſhed from his phyſical: or who ſay, that thoſe moral attributes, his holineſs, goodneſs, juſtice, and truth, are the ſame in him, that they are in the ideas

* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. v. p. 88.
† Ibid. p. 528.
‡ Ibid. p. 311.
§ Ibid. p. 368.
‖ Ibid. p. 313, 314.
** Ibid. p. 335. 453.
†† Ibid. p. 310.

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we form of thoſe perfections; which, he ſays, cannot be conceived *without manifeſt preſumption and blaſphemy:* upon this doctrine he chargeth men's *falſe conceptions and licentious reaſonings* about the divine nature and providence. He adds, that "theſe *falſe conceptions and licentious reaſonings* may proceed "likewiſe from the *analogical doctrine;* which, though it aſcribes "not to God human notions, yet aſcribes to him ſomething, "whatever it be, equivalent to them*." He affirms, that "goodneſs and juſtice in God—are ſomething tranſcendent, and of "which we cannot make any true judgment; and that it is impoſſible we ſhould argue with any certainty about them†." I ſhall only farther obſerve, that he brings a charge in this reſpect, not only againſt the Chriſtian divines, but againſt the heathen philoſophers. The reaſon he aſſigns, why they were "unable "to propagate natural religion, and to reform mankind, is becauſe they proceeded in Dr. Clarke's method, to argue *a priori* "from the moral attributes of God, his goodneſs, juſtice, &c. "which they aſſumed to be the ſame in him that they are in our "ideas‡."

By comparing theſe ſeveral paſſages together, it appears, that, according to this writer, we are unable to form any idea of the moral attributes of God: for if we cannot conceive of them according to our ideas, we cannot form any conception of them at all: that it is wrong to diſtinguiſh them from his phyſical attributes, or to ſay they are connected with thoſe attributes: that there is not only no ſuch thing in God as goodneſs or juſtice as we conceive of them, but nothing in him analogous or equivalent to thoſe qualities as they are in us, or which is fitted to produce correſpondent effects: that therefore it ought not to be ſaid of God, that he is juſt and good, holy and true, or that he is a lover of mankind, or is concerned for our happineſs, but only that he is powerful and wiſe: that we can only know God's moral attributes *a poſteriori* from the effects, and that many of the phænomena in nature are repugnant to thoſe attributes, and inconſiſtent with them: ſo that it is impoſſible for us to argue with any certainty about them. This is the plain intention

* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. v. p. 541. † Ibid. p. 311. 359, 360.
‡ Ibid. p. 334.

of

of the paſſages which have been cited, and others might be produced to the ſame purpoſe; though we ſhall find him afterwards plainly contradicting ſeveral things which here he has advanced.

If we conſider what his reaſon could be for ſetting up an hypotheſis ſo contrary to true theiſm, for which yet he would be thought to have ſo great a zeal, there are two things which he appears to have had in view.

1. That we are in no caſe to deduce our moral obligations from the moral attributes of God, or to propoſe to imitate God in thoſe attributes. He declares, that "the laws of nature are abſurdly founded in the moral attributes of God*;" *i. e.* it is abſurd to talk of his juſtice, goodneſs, righteouſneſs and truth, as giving riſe to thoſe laws, or appearing in the conſtitution of them. And as to the pretence of imitating the Deity in his moral excellencies, this is what he openly and avowedly condemns. This particularly is the deſign of the fourth of his fragments and eſſays in his fifth volume. He expreſsly aſſerts, that "God's moral attributes cannot be ſo diſcerned by us as to be the objects of our imitation†." He pronounces, that "it is abſurd, and worſe than abſurd, to aſſert that man can imitate God, except in a ſenſe ſo very remote, and ſo improper, that the expreſſions ſhould never be uſed, much leſs ſuch a duty recommended‡." And that "thoſe writers or preachers who exhort us to imitate God, muſt mean, not the God whom we ſee in his works, and in all that his providence orders; but the God who appears in their repreſentations of him, and who is often ſuch a God as no pious theiſt can acknowledge§." He declares for himſelf, that "he dares not uſe *theological familiarity, and talk of imitating God;* and treats that doctrine as *extravagant, falſe*, and *profane*||." He ſays, that "by aſſuming to imitate God, we give the ſtrongeſt proof of the imperfection of our nature, whilſt we neglect the real, and aſpire to a mock honour, as pride, ſeduced by adulation, is prone to do; and as religious pride, wrought up by ſelf-conceit into enthuſiaſm, does above all others**." And he mentions it as an inſtance of the impertinence of Socrates's doctrine, that "he conjured his auditors in the priſon to make

* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. v. p. 90. † Ibid. p. 63. ‡ Ibid. p. 62.
§ Ibid. p. 64. || Ibid. p. 44. 65. ** Ibid. p. 67.

"themſelves

"themſelves as like as poſſible to their great exemplar, the Su-
"preme Being*." Thus has this dogmatical and preſumptuous author taken upon him to paſs a ſevere and inſolent cenſure upon that which has been the doctrine of the moſt excellent philoſophers and moraliſts, and of one far ſuperior to them all, our bleſſed Saviour himſelf. See Mat. v. 45. 48. Luke iv. 35, 36. And he has particularly inſtanced in God's cauſing his ſun to ſhine on the evil and the good, and ſending rain on the juſt and unjuſt, as a proof that we cannot and ought not to aſpire after an imitation of him†;" though our Lord ſets this goodneſs of providence before us as a noble pattern, to engage us to an extenſive benevolence, and that we ſhould be ready to do good even to our enemies themſelves. There are indeed depths in God's providential diſpenſations, with regard to which we cannot pretend to imitate him, for want of knowing the reaſons upon which he proceeds; but this does not hinder, but that we may and ought to endeavour to reſemble him in his illuſtrious moral excellencies, as far as we can diſcern them in his works and in the revelations of his word, which in many inſtances we are able to do.

2. Another thing which he hath evidently in view, in denying that we can have any idea of the moral attributes of God, ſo as to make a true judgment of them, or to argue with any certainty about them, is to deſtroy the argument which is drawn from the conſideration of theſe moral attributes, to ſhew the probability of a future ſtate of retributions. For if God be perfectly good and juſt, this leads us to conclude that he will order it ſo, that in the final iſſue of things, a remarkable diſtinction ſhall be made between the righteous and the wicked; and that virtue ſhall upon the whole be crowned with its due reward, and vice meet with condign puniſhment: and ſince this is not uniformly done in this preſent ſtate, it is reaſonable to believe that there ſhall be a future ſtate of rewards and puniſhments. This is a way of arguing, which, by his own acknowledgment, has been urged by ſome of the beſt and wiſeſt men in all ages. To avoid this conſequence, he will not allow that there is any ſuch thing as juſtice and goodneſs in God according to our ideas, or any thing anſwering to what we call juſtice and goodneſs: and that it is

* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. iv. p. 117, 118. † Ibid. vol. v. p. 63.

preſumption

preſumption in us to determine what thoſe attributes require that God ſhould do*. And indeed to guard againſt this ſeems to have been a principal point with his lordſhip. It is for this that he denies, that providence extendeth its care to the individuals of the human race: and one of his chief prejudices againſt the Chriſtian revelation appears to me to be its ſetting theſe things in ſo ſtrong a light.

You eaſily perceive, that this part of our author's ſcheme is not of a trifling nature. It is not a mere ſpeculative error, but which, purſued to its proper conſequences, muſt have a mighty influence on religion and morals. I ſhall therefore examine it diſtinctly, and ſhall firſt offer ſome general conſiderations concerning God's moral attributes, to ſhew that they muſt neceſſarily be aſcribed to the Supreme Being: and then ſhall proceed to obviate the principal objections he hath advanced: after which I ſhall point to the manifold inconſiſtencies and contradictions he hath fallen into in relation to this ſubject.

I ſhall begin with ſome general conſiderations concerning God's moral attributes.

And 1. It is eſſential to the idea of God, that he is the *all-perfect* Being. So our author frequently calls him, and makes it neceſſary for us to regard him under that notion†. That is a remarkable declaration which he makes Vol. III. p. 299. "I "know, for I can demonſtrate by connecting the cleareſt and "moſt diſtinct of my real ideas, that there is a God, a firſt intel-"ligent cauſe of all things, whoſe infinite wiſdom and power "appear evidently in all his works, and to whom therefore I "aſcribe moſt rationally every other perfection, whether con-"ceivable or not conceivable by me." Here he mentions diſtinctly, as his manner is, God's *infinite wiſdom and power*, and takes no particular notice of his goodneſs; but ſurely this muſt be ſuppoſed to be included, when he adds, that not only wiſdom and power, but *every other perfection conceivable by us*, muſt be moſt rationally aſcribed to God. For is not goodneſs a perfection? And is it not conceivable by us? Yea, is it not the moſt amiable of all perfections, and that which gives a luſtre and glory to all the reſt? Is it poſſible to conceive a perfect character

* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. v. p. 453. † Ibid. vol. iii. p. 253.

without

without it? Almighty power and infinite wiſdom, if they could be ſuppoſed ſeparated from goodneſs and righteouſneſs, in the great Governor of the world, would create horror and averſion inſtead of love and eſteem. A God deſtitute of juſtice and goodneſs would be ſuch a God, as he moſt wrongfully repreſents the God of Moſes and St. Paul to be, an unjuſt, a cruel, a partial, and arbitrary Being* !

He is ſenſible, that in our ideas of perfection, goodneſs and righteouſneſs, or his moral attributes, are neceſſarily included: and that conſequently according to the rule he had laid down, *viz.* that it is *rational* for us to aſcribe to God every perfection, whether *conceivable* or *inconceivable by us*, we ought moſt certainly to aſcribe to him righteouſneſs, goodneſs, and truth. He endeavours therefore to guard againſt this by ſaying, though in plain contradiction to what he had before advanced:— "Let us not "meaſure his perfections by ours. Let us not preſume ſo much "as to aſcribe our perfections to him, even according to the "higheſt conceptions we are able to form of them; though we "reject every imperfection conceivable by us, when it is im-"puted to him†." He obſerves, that "the firſt and ſtrongeſt "impreſſions that we receive of benevolence, juſtice, and other "moral virtues, come from reflections on ourſelves and others; "from what we feel in ourſelves, and from what we obſerve in "other men. Theſe we acknowledge to be, however limited "and imperfect, the exellencies of our own nature, and there-"fore conceiving them without any limitation or perfection, we "aſcribe them to the Divine." But he ſays, "a very ſhort "analyſis of the excellencies of our own nature will be ſufficient "to ſhew, that they cannot be applied from man to God with-"out profaneneſs, nor from God to man without the moſt ſhame-"ful abſurdity‡." It will be eaſily acknowledged, that we cannot aſcribe any of thoſe qualities in our nature, which neceſſarily connote imperfection, to God in a literal and proper ſenſe; but to ſay that we ought not to aſcribe thoſe, which we cannot but look upon as the nobleſt excellencies and perfections of an intelligent Being, and of which we clearly diſcern the traces and

* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. v. p. 567. † Ibid. vol. iii. p. 558.
‡ Ibid. vol. v. p. 88, 89.

reſemblances

reſemblances in our own nature, to the infinitely perfect Being, at the ſame time taking care to remove every imperfection with which they are attended in us and our fellow-creatures, is highly abſurd, and a manifeſt contradiction to the common ſenſe of mankind. It is to ſay, that we are to conceive of God as the infinitely perfect Being, and yet we are not to aſcribe to him thoſe excellencies which we cannot poſſibly avoid regarding as neceſſarily included in the idea of infinite perfection. Nor is this, as he is pleaſed to repreſent it, a making man the *original*, and God only a *copy**; or, as he elſewhere expreſſeth it, a ſuppoſing God to be no more than an *infinite man*†. This argument, if it may be called ſo, is only a playing upon words. The word *man* carries in it the idea of a finite, imperfect, created being; and therefore to call God an infinite man has a very odd ſound. But if the meaning only be, that as man is an intelligent being, ſo God is infinite intelligence; and as man has moral diſpoſitions, the imperfect ſeeds and principles of goodneſs, juſtice, benevolence, God hath all theſe in the higheſt poſſible degree of eminency, without any imperfection and defect; what is there in this unworthy of the ſupreme and abſolutely perfect Being? It is true that, as he obſerves, *we do not know the manner of his being*‡; but as this by his own acknowledgment is no argument againſt aſcribing to him wiſdom and power, ſo neither is it againſt our aſcribing to him juſtice and goodneſs. He there aſſerts, that "we riſe from the knowledge of ourſelves, "and of the other works of God, to a knowledge of his exiſtence, "and of his wiſdom and power, which we call infinite." And may it not equally be ſaid, that we riſe from the conſideration of his works, and the illuſtrious diſplays of beneficent goodneſs to be found there, and from the knowledge of the moral ſentiments in our own breaſts, and which we cannot but approve, to the knowledge of his goodneſs, and moral excellencies? And ſince, by the very conſtitution of our minds, we cannot help regarding them as perfections, we are naturally led to aſcribe them in the ſupreme degree to the *All-perfect* Being. And to ſay, that when we do ſo, we make ourſelves the original, and him only the copy, is a ſtrange miſrepreſentation: for in that caſe we riſe from the

* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. v. p. 87. † Ibid. p. 310. ‡ Ibid. p. 88.

imperfect

imperfect traces and lineaments of those excellencies in our own souls, or which we discern in others, to the supreme goodness and benevolence, of which all human and created goodness is but a very faint and imperfect copy. And what can be more reasonable than to conclude, that he must be infinitely good and just, and true, who made us capable of discerning and feeling the amiableness and excellence of those moral dispositions and qualities, and who hath spread such beauty and order, and such a profusion of blessings, throughout this vast system!

Again, the moral attributes of God may be farther argued from this, that they are really inseparable from infinite wisdom and intelligence: and since wisdom could not be perfect without goodness and justice, these moral attributes must be ascribed to the Supreme Being as well as wisdom, which our author everywhere ascribes to him. We may as reasonably suppose him without the one as the other. As there are innumerable things which shew his wisdom, so there are which demonstrate his goodness and benignity. And if there are several appearances which we find it hard to reconcile to our ideas of goodness, so there are which seem not to be consistent with wisdom. And the answer is the same in both cases, that it is owing to our ignorance, and the narrowness of our views; and we shall soon find our author in effect acknowledging this. Power and wisdom without goodness and righteousness are so far from giving us a proper idea of an All-perfect Being, that it is the idea of a very imperfect one. This writer himself observes, that "if God be infinitely wise, he always knows and always does that which "is fittest to be done: to choose the best end, and to proportion "the means to it, is the very definition of wisdom*." And accordingly he asserts, that the wisdom of God always determineth him to do that *which is fittest upon the whole*. And this necessarily supposeth an universal rectitude of his nature. It includes both a perfect unerring knowledge of what is fittest and best, and a disposition and determination to act accordingly, and to do what is, all things considered, best and fittest to be done. And this is really to acknowledge God's moral attributes: for, as our author observes, "that which is fittest to be done is always just

* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. v. p. 332.

" and good *." So that God's wiſdom is neceſſarily ſuppoſed to be connected with his juſtice and goodneſs, as well as they with his wiſdom; and a regard to both is comprehended in chooſing what is fitteſt to be done. Wiſdom ſeparated from juſtice and goodneſs would not be true wiſdom, which always includes the worthieſt ends and propereſt means, but craft, which is not a real perfection, but the contrary.

This writer ſhews that he is ſenſible of this, when he aſſerts, that God's moral attributes are only " different modifications of " his wiſdom; and are barely names that we give to various ma- " nifeſtations of the infinite wiſdom of one ſimple uncompounded " Being." And he blames the divines for ſuppoſing, " that they " are in him, what they are in us, diſtinct affections, diſpoſitions, " and habitudes †." He ſays, that " after all that has been ſaid " to prove a neceſſary connexion between his phyſical and moral " attributes, we may obſerve them in his wiſdom ‡." And that " if they are ſo intimately connected with his power and wiſdom, " and ſo much the ſame in nature, that they cannot be ſeparated " in the exerciſe of them, in this caſe his natural attributes " abſorb the moral §." But what are we to underſtand by abſorb? May they not be intimately connected, and yet be of diſtinct conſideration? Are not the divine power and wiſdom intimately connected? Can they ever be ſeparated in the exerciſe? Is his power ever a blind power, deſtitute of wiſdom and intelligence? Or, is his wiſdom an impotent wiſdom, deſtitute of power? Yet he owns the ideas of power and wiſdom in God to be diſtinct, though they are neither of them really diſtinguiſhed from his eſſence. He is indeed pleaſed to paſs a cenſure on the divines, for *parcelling out a divine moral nature into various attributes like the human* ‖. And he ſometimes ſeems to find fault with the diſtinguiſhing any attributes at all in God. He ſays, that " ſince the wiſdom of God is as much God as the will of " God, and the will as the wiſdom, it is abſurd to diſtinguiſh " them: that it is ſomething worſe to reaſon about the divine, as " we do about the human intellect, and to divide and parcel out " the former upon the plan of the latter. Since the will of God

* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. v. p. 313. † Ibid. p. 335.
‡ Ibid. p. 88. § Ibid. p. 313. ‖ Ibid. p. 453.

" is

" is not like that of man, dark and liable to be ſeduced, why " are we led to conclude that a ſuperior faculty is neceſſary to " determine it, as the judgment of reaſon does, or ſhould, deter- " mine that of man?" Yet he immediately after diſtinguiſhes between the *will* and *knowledge* of God, and ſuppoſes it neceſſary to diſtinguiſh them *to be* (as he expreſſes it) a *little more intelligible**: and elſewhere he talks of the *rule which infinite wiſdom preſcribes to infinite power*†. And all along throughout his eſſays he ſpeaks of wiſdom and power as diſtinct attributes of God. The one therefore does not, to uſe his expreſſion, *abſorb* the other, though they are not ſeparated in the exerciſe. This ſhews that perfections may be intimately connected without being abſorbed, or, in other words, confounded one with another: and therefore it is no argument, that there are no ſuch diſtinct attributes as juſtice, or righteouſneſs and goodneſs, becauſe they are intimately and inſeparably connected with his power and wiſdom. On the contrary, this ſuppoſes that there are ſuch attributes. For it would be abſurd to talk of their being connected with his wiſdom, or of their being to be *abſorbed* in his wiſdom, if there were no ſuch qualities, or attributes: and ſince, as Lord Bolingbroke himſelf elſewhere acknowledgeth, *we muſt ſpeak of God after the manner of men*‡, if we ſpeak of theſe qualities at all, we muſt ſpeak of them as diſtinct attributes.

Let us now conſider our author's objections.

1. He urges, that " the moral as well as phyſical attributes of " God can only be known *a poſteriori*. They muſt be diſcerned " in the works of God, and in the conduct of Providence. " And it is evident they are not, cannot be ſo diſcerned in them, " as to be the objects of our imitation§. Every thing ſhews " the power and wiſdom of God, conformably to our ideas of " wiſdom and power in the phyſical world and in the moral; but " every thing does not ſhew in like manner the juſtice and good- " neſs of God, conformably to our ideas of theſe attributes in " either‖. None of the phænomena can be ſtrained into a re- " pugnancy to the divine wiſdom; but it cannot be diſputed, " that many of them are repugnant to our ideas of goodneſs and

* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. v. p. 5. † Ibid. vol. iii. p. 53.
‡ Ibid. vol. v. p. 468. § Ibid. p. 63. ‖ Ibid. p. 311.

"juſtice*." Some other paſſages to the ſame purpoſe were mentioned above, which I need not here repeat. In oppoſition to this it may be obſerved, that, as was before hinted, the characters of goodneſs and benignity are conſpicuous in the conſtitution of things, as well as of wiſdom and power. And if there are ſeveral particular phænomena not conformable to our ideas of goodneſs and rightcouſneſs, there are alſo ſeveral appearances not conformable to our ideas of wiſdom, and the reaſons and deſigns of which do not appear. It is well known, that many are the objections which the atheiſts have made againſt the wiſdom of God, as appearing in the conſtitution both of the natural and moral world. It is his own obſervation, that "we muſt be "prepared to meet with ſeveral appearances which we cannot "explain, nor therefore reconcile to the ideas we endeavour to "form of the divine perfection. If it be true, that infinite wiſ"dom and power created and govern the univerſe, it cannot but "follow, that ſome of the phænomena may be proportionable, "and that others muſt be diſproportionable to our and to every "other finite underſtanding†." He very properly expoſes the abſurdity of the atheiſts in arguing againſt the exiſtence, attributes, and providence of God, from the difficulties relating to them; and obſerves, that "theſe difficulties do not embarraſs the "theiſt — and inſtead of being ſurpriſed to find them, he would "be ſurpriſed not to find them —— That there muſt be many "phænomena both phyſical and moral, for which he can, and "for which he cannot account — And that there are ſecrets of "the divine nature and œconomy which human reaſon cannot "penetrate‡." The difficulties therefore relating to the divine goodneſs are no reaſon for not acknowledging that goodneſs, any more than the difficulties relating to the divine wiſdom are a good reaſon againſt acknowledging the wiſdom of God. We may here apply his own way of arguing. "The power of executing," ſays he, "is ſeen in every inſtance; and though we cannot diſcern "the wiſdom of contrivance and direction in every inſtance, yet "we ſee them in ſo many, that it becomes the higheſt abſurdity "not to acknowledge them in all." And he takes notice of the

* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. v. p. 368. † Ibid. p. 365.
‡ Ibid. vol. iii. p. 186, 187.

folly

folly of atheiſts in objecting againſt it, whereby they only ſhew their own ignorance. He adds, that " the wiſdom of God is not " ſo often diſcernible by us as the power of God, nor the good- " neſs as the wiſdom. But a multitude of the phænomena being " conformable *to our ideas of goodneſs*, we may reaſon about it as " we did juſt now about the divine wiſdom*;" *i. e.* that though we cannot diſcern the goodneſs of God according to our ideas in every thing, yet we ſee it in ſo many, that it would be the high- eſt abſurdity not to acknowledge it in all; where he ſeems to me plainly to give up the point, and to aſſert, that we ought to acknowledge the goodneſs of God, even according to our ideas of goodneſs, as well as his wiſdom, to be an attribute belonging to the Supreme Being: and that this may be juſtly argued from his works.

But let us proceed to conſider ſome other of his objections: He argues againſt aſcribing moral attributes, or the excellen- cies of our nature to God, becauſe we cannot aſcribe to him for- titude and temperance. He aſketh, " How can we deduce forti- " tude from the attributes of God, or aſcribe this virtue to him, " who can endure no pain, nor be expoſed to any danger? How " temperance, when it would be the moſt horrid blaſphemy to " ſuppoſe him ſubject to any human appetites and paſſions, and " much more to ſome ſo inordinate as to require a particular " virtue to reſtrain and govern them? I might bring many more " inſtances of the ſame kind. But he who will not be convin- " ced by theſe, how abſurdly the laws of nature are founded by " ſome writers in the moral attributes of God, will be convinced " by none †." He ſeems to have a good opinion of this way of arguing, for he urges it more than once ‡. But though fortitude, as it ſignifies a bearing up under evils and ſufferings, and tempe- rance, as it ſignifies the reſtraining and governing the appetites and paſſions, cannot be properly aſcribed to God, becauſe they neceſſarily connote the being liable to evils and imperfections, it doth not follow, that therefore righteouſneſs and goodneſs, and univerſal benevolence, which imply no ſuch imperfection, and are the nobleſt excellencies of an intelligent nature that we can

* Bolingbroke's Works, vol v. p. 335. † Ibid. p. 90. ‡ Ibid. p. 311.

poſſibly conceive, may not be applied to the Supreme and Abſolutely-perfect Being: and as to fortitude and temperance, though they cannot be properly aſcribed to God, no more than piety and ſubmiſſion and reſignation to the divine will, which are eminent human virtues, yet they are the objects of the divine approbation, and our obligation to them may be juſtly argued and deduced from God's moral attributes, from his holineſs and the rectitude of his nature, which cauſeth him to delight in moral beauty and order, and to require that his reaſonable creatures ſhould act in a manner becoming the excellent faculties he hath given them; and that they ſhould maintain that temper and conduct which tendeth to the true perfection and happineſs of their natures, which theſe virtues manifeſtly do.

He farther objects, that "our ideas of the divine attributes "muſt neceſſarily be inadequate, both on account of the infinite "diſtance between the divine and human nature, and on ac- "count of the numberleſs and to us unknown relations, re- "ſpectively to all which the divine providence acts: which, if "we did know them, we ſhould be unable to compare, and in "which, therefore, the harmony of the divine perfections would "not be diſcernible by us—That therefore we are very incompe- "tent judges of the moral attributes of God, and of what they re- "quire God ſhould do in the government of the world—Nor can "we make any true judgment, or argue with any certainty about "them," as he endeavours to prove from the authority of St. Paul, and Dr. Barrow*. This only proves what will be eaſily allowed, that we cannot comprehend or ſee the whole extent of the divine proceedings; and that he may in many caſes have reaſons for his proceedings which we are not acquainted with; but does not prove, that there is no ſuch thing as goodneſs or righteouſneſs in God, according to our ideas of them, nor any thing equivalent to them; or that we can in no caſe argue from what his goodneſs and righteouſneſs require, nor judge of the equity of his proceedings. Although the Scriptures often ſpeak of God's ways of providence as above human comprehenſion, yet they alſo repreſent him as ſometimes appealing to men them-

* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. v. p. 359. 362.

ſelves

ſelves concerning the equity of his proceedings. Our author indeed repreſents this as an abſurdity, but he does not prove it ſo, or ſhew that there is any thing in it unworthy of the moſt wiſe and righteous and benevolent Governor of the world. Will it follow, that becauſe there are ſome difficult caſes concerning which we cannot judge, that therefore we cannot judge in any caſe at all? We may in ſome caſes ſafely argue from our ideas of the divine goodneſs and juſtice; *e. g.* that he will order it ſo, that a remarkable difference ſhall be made upon the whole between good and bad men; and that virtue ſhall be rewarded, and vice and wickedneſs puniſhed. Will any man ſay, that we cannot ſafely conclude from the goodneſs and juſtice of the Supreme Being, that he will not ſuffer or appoint an innocent creature to be eternally miſerable? He obſerves, ſpeaking of God's knowledge, power and wiſdom, that "though we cannot frame "full and adequate ideas of them, it will not follow that we have, "properly ſpeaking, no knowledge at all of his attributes, nor of "the manner in which they are exerciſed—That our ideas of "divine intelligence and wiſdom may be neither fantaſtic nor "falſe, and yet God's manner of knowing may be very different "from ours*." In like manner it may be ſaid, concerning God's moral attributes, his juſtice and goodneſs, that though we cannot frame full and adequate ideas of them, it will not follow that we have, properly ſpeaking, no knowledge of them at all, and of the manner in which they are exerciſed. Our ideas of them are neither falſe nor fantaſtic, though in many inſtances they may be exerciſed in a way different from our apprehenſion. To this may be applied what he ſaith againſt Archbiſhop King, that "though we have not a direct knowledge of the nature of "God by archetypal ideas, yet we are not reduced to know "nothing of him except by analogy. It is a real knowledge, "and may be ſaid to be direct, if we may be allowed to call any "knowledge by demonſtration direct†."

Another argument urged by this writer, to ſhew that the divines are in the wrong to talk of God's infinite goodneſs and juſtice as of his wiſdom and power, is this: that "the latter pre-"ſerve their nature without any conceivable bounds, and the

* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. v. p. 524, 525. † Ibid. p. 539.

"former muſt ceaſe to be what they are, unleſs we conceive "them bounded. Their nature implies neceſſarily a limitation "in the exerciſe of them*." In anſwer to this, it may be obſerved, that God's wiſdom and power, conſidered in themſelves, and as they are in God, are infinite; ſo alſo are his goodneſs and juſtice: but conſidered relatively in the exerciſe of them as terminated in the creature, the one may be ſaid to be limited as well as the other; *i. e.* the effects of neither of them are properly infinite. Infinite power and wiſdom, as exerciſed on the creature, produce finite and limited effects; ſo doth infinite goodneſs and juſtice: but ſtill conſidered as qualities and attributes of the divine eſſence, they are infinite, of an eminent and tranſcendent nature, and would be really in God, though there were no creature formed. He did not begin to be good when the creatures began to exiſt, though then the exerciſe of goodneſs, under the direction of his wiſdom, reſpecting the creatures, began.

His other objections proceed all upon a groſs miſrepreſentation of the ſentiments of thoſe whom he hath thought fit to oppoſe. He chargeth Dr. Clarke with aſſerting, that juſtice and goodneſs, and the reſt of the moral attributes, are in God juſt what they are in our *imperfect, unſteady, complex ideas;* and that the rule according to which God exerciſeth thoſe attributes, *viz.* the nature and reaſon of things, is obvious to the underſtanding of all intelligent beings†. This is not true, if underſtood of the whole nature and reaſon of things in all its vaſt extent; nor has that learned divine any-where aſſerted that it is ſo.

Again he repreſents the divines as aſſerting, that "the will of "God is not determined by the harmonious concurrence of all "his attributes," and that "his goodneſs and juſtice do not act "in *a concurrence with his wiſdom*‡." He charges them with maintaining, that "goodneſs in God is the only directing and "governing principle, and not wiſdom: and that wiſdom ought "to contrive, and power to execute, under this direction." And he argues, that "if it were ſo, the happineſs of man ought to be "proportionable to the goodneſs of God, that is, infinite." And in oppoſition to this he aſſerts, that "wiſdom ought to be deemed

* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. v. p. 328. † Ibid. p. 252.
‡ Ibid. p. 313, 342.

"the

"the directing principle of divine conduct*." Nor will any divine deny that wiſdom is the directing principle. They all plead for the harmonious concurrence of the divine attributes, though they are not for confounding thoſe attributes. Goodneſs in God is not to be regarded as a blind inſtinct, which neceſſarily acteth at all times, and in every inſtance, to the utmoſt extent of its capacity, and to the higheſt poſſible degree; but as a moſt wiſe goodneſs, *i. e.* a goodneſs which is always in conjunction with, and under the direction of, infinite wiſdom. For goodneſs without diſtinction or diſcernment could ſcarce be accounted a virtue or a perfection. Such a notion of the divine goodneſs would be diſhonourable to God, and of ill conſequence to the intereſts of religion and virtue in the world. But his goodneſs is that of a moſt holy and underſtanding mind, and is always exerciſed in ſuch a way as ſeemeth moſt fit to his infinite wiſdom, which governeth the outward effects of it, and appointeth when, where, and how, it ſhall be communicated. We are not merely to fix our views on goodneſs and benevolence, in conſidering what God may do or may not do with regard to the happineſs of his creatures; but to take in every conſideration, that of his wiſdom, his juſtice, his holineſs and righteouſneſs, and the majeſty of his government.

He frequently accuſes the divines, and even the ancient theiſts, for ſuppoſing that God made man for this end, to communicate happineſs to him. But then, that he may more effectually expoſe this notion, he claps in the word *only*, as if they maintained, that God had no other end in view in creating man, but to make him happy to the utmoſt poſſible degree, to give him an *happineſs without allay*, as he expreſſeth it, and to *make him not only moderately, but immoderately happy in the world*†. It is thus that he thinks fit to repreſent their ſenſe: and he ſays, "this is an *hypotheſis which the phænomena contradict*‡. But though it cannot reaſonably be denied, that, according to the beſt conceptions we can form, one principal motive in God's making reaſonable beings was to communicate happineſs to them, yet I think we do not know enough of God, nor have a ſufficiently

* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. v. p. 341. † Ibid. p. 345. 392. 421.
‡ Ibid. p. 345.

comprehen-

comprehenſive view of things, and of the reaſons an infinite mind might have for his proceedings, to pronounce confidently, that he had, and could have, no other reaſon or motive. It may well be ſuppoſed, that in bringing this vaſt univerſe and the various orders of beings in it into exiſtence, he had in view the exerciſe and diſplay of his own glorious perfections, not merely of any one, but of all his perfections, his majeſty and greatneſs, his wiſdom, power, holineſs, and goodneſs, in conjunction. This is an end worthy of God, as far as he can be ſaid to propoſe an end to himſelf. And when it is ſaid, that he made his reaſonable creatures with a deſign to communicate happineſs to them, it muſt be underſtood thus: that he had it in view to make them happy, in ſuch a way, in ſuch meaſures and degrees, in ſuch times, ſeaſons, and proportions, as ſhould ſeem fit to his infinite wiſdom, and ſhould be moſt worthy of them, and becoming his own glorious perfections. His end in creating them was not abſolutely to make every individual of them happy at all events, however they ſhould behave; but conditionally to make them happy in the right uſe and improvement of their own powers, and in ſuch a way as is conſiſtent with moral agency and government, and becoming his own infinite wiſdom, goodneſs, righteouſneſs, and purity.

It is farther with a view to expoſe the doctrine of the divines relating to the goodneſs of God, that he repreſents it as their general ſentiment, that all things were made merely for the ſake of man; that this vaſt univerſal ſyſtem was formed for him alone: and he ſets himſelf to ſhew, as he might eaſily do, the abſurdity of ſuppoſing the whole univerſe to have been made merely for ſome minute part of it*. This particularly is the ſubject of the 45th and 46th of his fragments and eſſays. But it is obſervable, that he himſelf, after having abuſed the divines for ſuppoſing that God made man to communicate happineſs to him, expreſsly aſſerts, that "God has made us happy, and has put it "into our power to make ourſelves happier, by a due uſe of our "reaſon, which leads us into the practice of moral virtue, and "all the duties of ſociety†." "That we are obliged to our "Creator for a certain rule, and ſufficient means of arriving at

* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. v. p. 330. † Ibid. p. 384.

"happineſs,

" happineſs, and have none to blame but ourſelves, when we " fail of it*." " That God made us to be happy here.—He " may make us happier in another ſyſtem of being.—That there " is even in this world much more good than evil, and the pre- " ſent ſtate of mankind is happy in it†."—" And that the end of " the human ſtate is human happineſs‡."

You are, I doubt not, by this time prepared for what I propoſed to ſhew in the laſt place, the contradictions and inconſiſtencies our author has fallen into in treating of this ſubject. I ſuppoſe you to bear in mind the ſevere cenſures he hath paſſed upon the divines for pretending to connect the phyſical and moral attributes of God, and for aſcribing to him moral attributes, juſtice and goodneſs, according to our ideas. And now I deſire you to compare the paſſages already produced with thoſe that follow.

God ſhews us our duty, " by which we ſtand in the relation " of ſubjects and ſervants to a gracious and beneficent Lord and " Maſter, who gave us laws neither captious nor ambiguous, and " who commands us nothing which it is not our intereſt to per- " form§. He here ſuppoſes it to be a thing evident from the law of nature, that we ſtand in relation to God as our *gracious and beneficent Lord and Maſter*, who has our intereſt and happineſs in view in the very laws he enjoins. And is not this plainly to aſcribe goodneſs to him, even according to our ideas of goodneſs? And elſewhere he repreſents it, as if he could not aſk more of a *beneficent Creator* than he has done for us‖. He ſays, " the theiſt acknowledges whatever God has done to be juſt and " good in itſelf, though it doth not appear ſuch in every in- " ſtance, conformably to his ideas of juſtice and goodneſs. He " imputes the difference to the defect of his ideas, and not to any " defect of the divine attributes.—Where he ſees them, he owns " them explicitly: where he does not ſee them, he pronounces " nothing about them. He is as far from denying them" (*i. e.* from denying the juſtice and goodneſs of God) " as he is from " denying the wiſdom and power of God**." The moſt orthodox divine could hardly expreſs himſelf more fully on this

* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. v. p. 388. † Ibid. p. 391, 392.
‡ Ibid. p. 544. § Ibid. p. 97. ‖ Ibid. p. 481. ** Ibid. p. 311, 312.

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head than Lord Bolingbroke has here done. To the ſame purpoſe he introduces a meditation or ſoliloquy of a ſincere and devout theiſt, in which he repreſents him as ſaying, among other things, "Man enjoys numberleſs benefits by the fitneſs of his "nature to this conſtitution, unaſked, unmerited, freely beſtow-"ed. The *wiſdom and goodneſs* of God are therefore manifeſt. "May I enjoy thankfully the benefits beſtowed on me by the "divine liberality: may I receive the evils to which I am ex-"poſed patiently, nay willingly *."

But what deſerves particularly to be remarked is, that whereas he repreſents the aſcribing goodneſs and juſtice to God according to our ideas, to be what gives great advantage to the atheiſts with regard to the original of evil; as if he thought it impoſſible to reconcile the evil that is in the world with God's moral attributes, and the ſuppoſition of his being good and righteous and holy, as well as powerful and wiſe; he has taken great pains to confute his own arguments. For not a few of his fragments and eſſays in his fifth volume are taken up in endeavouring to remove and anſwer that objection, and to ſhew that the evil there is in the preſent conſtitution of things in this world, is reconcileable to the juſtice and goodneſs of God, even according to the ideas we form of them †. He undertakes to defend the *goodneſs* of God againſt the atheiſts and divines ‡! And having, as he pretends, done this, he proceeds to vindicate the *juſtice* and *righteouſneſs* of God *againſt the ſame confederates* §. Thus the ſame author, who had uſed his utmoſt efforts to ſhew, in oppoſition to the divines, that moral attributes, particularly juſtice and goodneſs, ought not to be aſcribed to God according to the ideas we conceive of them, and that we cannot form any judgment concerning them, takes upon him afterwards to vindicate thoſe very attributes againſt the divines, who, he pretends, are for deſtroying them. So ſtrangely inconſiſtent is this writer's ſcheme, that on the one hand, with a view to invalidate the argument for a ſtate of future retributions drawn from the moral attributes of God, he endeavours to take away thoſe attributes,

* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. v. p. 338, 339—See alſo l. iii. p. 358.

† See vol. v. frag. 43, 44. 48, 49, 50, 51, 52, 53, 54.

‡ Ibid. p. 335. § Ibid. p. 393.

or

or confound them with the phyſical, and to ſhew that there is no ſuch thing as goodneſs or juſtice in God according to our ideas, nor any thing equivalent to them; and that the phæno-mena are repugnant to thoſe attributes: and on the other hand, with the ſame view of weakening or deſtroying the argument for a future ſtate from thoſe attributes, he ſets himſelf to prove, that the preſent ſtate of things is ſufficiently conformable to our ideas of the divine juſtice and goodneſs, and that theſe attributes are ſo fully exerciſed or diſplayed here, that there is no need for any further manifeſtation or diſplay of them hereafter.

I ſhall only produce one paſſage more, and it is a very remark-able one. Towards the concluſion of his laſt volume, when he pretends to draw a line of ſeparation between natural and artifi-cial theology, he obſerves, that by that, *viz.* natural theology, "we are taught to acknowledge and adore the infinite wiſdom "and power of God, manifeſted in every part of his creation, "and aſcribe *goodneſs* and *juſtice* to him wherever he intend-"ed that we ſhould ſo aſcribe them, that is, wherever either "his works, or the diſpenſations of his providence, do as neceſ-"ſarily communicate theſe notions to our minds, as thoſe of "wiſdom and power are communicated to us in the whole ex-"tent of both. Wherever they are not ſo communicated, "we may aſſume very reaſonably, that it is on motives ſtrictly "conformable to all the divine attributes, and therefore to good-"neſs and juſtice, though unknown to us, from whom ſo many "circumſtances, with a relation to which the divine providence "acts, muſt be often concealed: or, we may reſolve all into "the wiſdom of God, and not preſume to account for them "morally*." The laſt part of this paſſage hath a reference to his ſcheme of reſolving all into the divine wiſdom. But you cannot but obſerve here, that after his repeated invectives againſt the divines, and againſt artificial theology, for aſcribing moral attributes to God, juſtice and goodneſs, according to our ideas of them, he has in effect here acknowledged all that the divines themſelves teach. They believe that God is always good and juſt, though they do not pretend to account for the exerciſe of goodneſs and juſtice in every particular inſtance: but that enough

* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. v. p. 517.

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we know to convince us of both: the notions of which, this writer himſelf here owns to be, in many inſtances at leaſt, neceſſarily communicated to us from his works; and ſurely then we ſhould endeavour to reſemble him in theſe his moral perfections, as far as we know them.

Before I conclude this letter, I ſhall take ſome notice, becauſe I ſhall not afterwards have ſo proper an opportunity for it, of what he hath obſerved concerning eternal ideas in God, and concerning the eternal reaſons and fitneſſes of things.

He finds great fault with Dr. Cudworth, Dr. Clarke, and others, for talking of ideas in God, as if they ſuppoſed his manner of knowing to be exactly the ſame with ours; which certainly was far from their intention. He pronounces, that "the "doctrine of eternal ideas in the divine mind has been much "abuſed by thoſe who are in the delirium of metaphyſical theo-"logy. It cannot be underſtood in a literal ſenſe." And he thinks "ſuch a way of talking is profane as well as preſumptuous; "and that it is ſilly too, and mere cant*." He has ſeveral obſervations, which are for the moſt part very juſt, to ſhew, that God's manner of knowing is very different from ours, and that he does not know by the help or intervention of ideas as we do†. I need not take particular notice of thoſe obſervations, which contain little in them, that will not be acknowledged by thoſe whom he has thought to oppoſe. The raſh and improper uſe of the word *ideas*, as applied to God, hath no doubt led to miſtakes, and to wrong and unwarrantable ways of expreſſion: as any one muſt be convinced that knows what contentions there have been in the ſchools about the divine ideas, which have given riſe to arrogant and fooliſh queſtions, ſcarce conſiſtent with the veneration that is due to the ſupreme incomprehenſible Being. Yet the modeſt uſe of that expreſſion is not to be too rigidly cenſured. Our author himſelf, who blames it ſo much in others, hath on ſeveral occaſions fallen into the ſame manner of expreſſion himſelf. Thus he obſerves, that "it might be determined in the "*divine ideas*, that there ſhould be a gradation of life and intellect "throughout the univerſe‡:" and he repeats it again, "that this

* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. iii. p. 356.

† Ibid. p. 355, 356, 357. vol. v. p. 35, 36, 37, 38.

‡ Ibid. p. 337.

"appeared

" appeared neceſſary or fit in the *divine ideas*, that is, to ſpeak " more rationally, to the ſupreme divine reaſon or intention*." Where he uſeth the term *divine ideas* as equivalent to the *divine reaſon and intention*, though he thinks the latter more proper. He elſewhere declares, that " the *ideas* of God, if we may aſcribe " *ideas* to him, no more than his ways, are thoſe of man†." And in one of his moſt celebrated pieces, publiſhed in his own life-time, he ſaith, that " God in his *eternal ideas*, for we are able " to conceive no other manner of knowing, has preſcribed to " himſelf that rule by which he governs the univerſe he creat-" ed‡." Here he not only aſcribes ideas to God, but *eternal ideas*, by which God hath preſcribed to himſelf a rule for his governing the world. This rule he there explaineth to be " a fit-" neſs ariſing from the various natures, and more various rela-" tions of things, in the ſyſtem which he hath conſtituted:" which fitneſs he there ſuppoſeth to have been known to God in his *eternal ideas*. And yet he hath frequently inveighed againſt Dr. Clarke, for ſpeaking of the eternal reaſons and relations of things. This particularly is the ſubject of the ſecond, fifty-eighth, and fifty-ninth of his fragments and eſſays in the fifth volume of his works. He treats that learned divine as if he maintained, that theſe reaſons and fitneſſes of things were real natures, exiſting independently of God, and co-eternal with him: and yet he himſelf, ſpeaking of Dr. Cudworth and others, obſerveth, that when they talk of eternal ideas and eſſences independent on the will of God, " they do not mean by theſe eter-" nal independent natures, any natures at all, but ſuch intelligible " eſſences and *rationes* of things, as are objects of the mind§." And it is his own obſervation, that " God knew from all eternity " every ſyſtem that he created in time—the relations things " ſhould bear—and the proportions they ſhould have‖:" And that " to the divine omniſcience the future is like the preſent;" and therefore he thinks it improper to talk of *preſcience* in God. He repreſents it as " a great truth, that the whole ſeries of things " is at all times actually preſent to the divine mind, ſo that we

* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. v. p. 365. † Ibid. p. 344.
‡ See Idea of a Patriot King, in vol iii. of his Works, p. 53.
§ Bolingbroke's Works, vol. v. p. 15. ‖ Ibid. p. 7.

" may

"may ſay properly, that God knows things, becauſe they are "actual to him*." According to his own repreſentation therefore it may be juſtly ſaid, that all the fitneſſes and relations of things were from the beginning actually preſent to the divine mind. And he accordingly declares, that God was *determined* by his *infinite wiſdom* to *proceed with his creatures* in *all the exertions* of *his power*, *according to the fitneſs of things*†: or in other words, as he elſewhere expreſſeth it, God does *not govern by mere arbitrary will*, but always *does that which is fitteſt to be done*; and which he from all eternity ſaw would be fitteſt to be done. And this ſeems to be all that is really intended by thoſe who ſpeak of the eternal reaſons and fitneſſes of things. Whether therefore the manner of expreſſion be ſtrictly proper or not, this writer had no right to paſs ſo ſevere a cenſure upon it as he has done, ſince it comes ſo near to his own.

But I believe you will think it is time to quit this ſubject, and paſs on to ſome other things in Lord Bolingbroke's works, which relate to things of no ſmall importance, and which will deſerve a particular conſideration.

I am yours, &c.

* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. v. p. 457, 458. † Ibid. p. 435.

LET-

LETTER XXIV.

The Doctrine of Divine Providence nearly connected with that of the Exiſtence of God—Lord Bolingbroke's Account of it conſidered—He acknowledges a general, but denies a particular Providence, and aſſerts, that Providence relates only to collective Bodies, but doth not extend to Individuals—The true Notion of Providence ſtated—What we are to underſtand by a particular Providence—The Reaſonableneſs of believing it, and the great Importance of it ſhewn—The contrary Scheme is abſurd, and inconſiſtent with itſelf, and of the worſt Conſequence to Mankind—The Objections againſt a particular Providence examined—Concerning occaſional Interpoſitions—They are not properly miraculous, nor Deviations from the general Laws of Providence, but Applications of thoſe Laws to particular Caſes—To acknowledge ſuch Interpoſitions is not to ſuppoſe the World governed by Miracles, nor to introduce an univerſal Theocracy like the Jewiſh—Angels may be employed in particular Caſes as Miniſters of Providence.

SIR,

THE doctrine of divine providence hath a very near connexion with that of the exiſtence of the Deity, and is no leſs neceſſary to be believed. To acknowledge a God that brought all things into exiſtence, and yet to deny that he afterwards taketh care of the creatures he hath made, or that he exerciſeth any inſpection over them, as a moral governor, or concerneth himſelf about their actions, and the events relating to them, is, with regard to all the purpoſes of religion, the ſame thing as not to acknowledge a God at all. It is one great excellence of the holy Scriptures of the Old and New Teſtament, that they every-where teach us to have a conſtant regard to the divine providence, as preſiding over the univerſal ſyſtem, and all the orders of beings in it, and as in a particular manner exerciſing a continual care and inſpection towards mankind, obſerving all their actions, and ordering and diſpoſing the events relating to them with infinite wiſdom, righteouſneſs, and goodneſs. But this doctrine

of providence, which, one ſhould think, ought mightily to recommend the Scriptures to every good mind, ſeems to have been one principal ground of the prejudices which Lord Bolingbroke hath conceived againſt thoſe ſacred writings. It is true, that he frequently affecteth to ſhew a zeal for divine providence: he ſets up as an advocate for its proceedings againſt the divines, who, he pretends, join with the atheiſts in miſrepreſenting and oppoſing it. But if his ſcheme be narrowly examined, it will appear, that, notwithſtanding his fair pretences, he doth not acknowledge a providence in that ſenſe in which it is moſt uſeful and neceſſary to believe it.

He declares, that "in aſſerting the juſtice of providence, he "has choſen rather to inſiſt on the moſt viſible and undeniable "courſe of a general providence, than to aſſume a diſpenſation "of particular providences*." He obſerves, that "the world "is governed by laws, which the Creator impoſed on the phy"ſical and moral ſyſtems, when he willed them into exiſtence, "and which muſt be in force as long as they laſt; and any change "in which would be a change in the ſyſtems themſelves. Theſe "laws are invariable, but they are general, and from this gene"rality what we call contingencies ariſe†." "The courſe of "things rolls on through a vaſt variety of contingent events; "for ſuch they are to our apprehenſion; according to the firſt "impreſſions of motion that were given it by the firſt Mover, and "under the direction of an univerſal providence‡." "As to "the brute animals, they are left under the direction of inſtinct: "and as to men, God has given his human creatures the materials "of phyſical and moral happineſs, in the phyſical and moral con"ſtitution of things. He has given them faculties and powers, "neceſſary to collect and apply theſe materials, and to carry on "the work—This the Creator has done for us. What we ſhall "do for ourſelves, he has left to the freedom of our elections. "This is the plan of divine wiſdom: and we know nothing more "particular, and indeed nothing more at all, of the diſpenſations "of providence than this§." This then is all the part he allows to providence in the moral world, that God has given man rea-

* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. v. p. 414.
† Ibid. p. 416.
‡ Ibid. p. 379.
§ Ibid. p. 473, 474.

ſon,

ſon, and, as he elſewhere obſerves, paſſion*, and has left him to the freedom of his own will, without ever concerning himſelf farther about the individuals of the human race, or exerciſing any inſpection over men's moral conduct, in order to the rewarding the good, or puniſhing the bad. That this is his intention is manifeſt, by comparing this with other paſſages. He expreſsly declares, that "it is plain from the whole courſe of "God's providence, that he regards his human creatures col-"lectively, not individually, how worthy ſoever every one of "them deems himſelf to be a particular object of the divine "care†." This, of God's regarding men collectively, not individually, is what he frequently repeats; and it appears to be a principal point in his ſcheme. With the ſame view he declares, that the ſanctions of the law of nature relate not to individuals, but to collective bodies‡. He finds fault with the notion, which, he ſays, obtained among the heathens, "that God was conſtantly "attentive to the affairs of men§." And he aſſerts, that "God "may foreſee, or rather ſee, all the moſt contingent events that "happen in the courſe of his general providence; but not pro-"vide for particular caſes, nor determine the exiſtence of parti-"cular men‖." He obſerves, that "the divine providence has "provided means to puniſh individuals, by directing men to "form ſocieties, and to eſtabliſh laws, in the execution of which "civil magiſtrates are the vicegerents of providence: and when "the immorality of individuals becomes that of a whole ſociety, "then the judgments of God follow, and men are puniſhed col-"lectively in the courſe of a general providence." So that he allows no puniſhments by providence for individuals, but thoſe which are executed by the civil magiſtrates. And if a man can eſcape puniſhment from them, he has nothing to fear from God; except the whole community be as bad as himſelf: and even then the puniſhment may not happen in that or the next age, till he ſhall be no more.

Our author indeed ſometimes declares, that "he neither affirms "nor denies particular providences**." And after having obſerved, that there is little credit to be given to the reports con-

* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. v. p. 417. † Ibid. p. 431.
‡ Ibid. p. 90. § Ibid. p. 211. ‖ Ibid. p. 462. ** Ibid. p. 413, 414.

cerning particular acts of providence, wrought on particular occasions, he adds, that "yet he will not presume to deny, that "there have been any such*." He makes the same declaration afterwards towards the end of his book†. But notwithstanding these professions, it is a point that he hath very much laboured to destroy, the belief of a particular providence. This is the express design of several of his Fragments and Essays in the fifth volume of his works; especially of the fifty-fifth, fifty-sixth, fifty-seventh, sixty-second, and sixty-fourth, of those Essays; in all which he argues directly, and in some of them largely, against that doctrine. And after having observed, that *what we find in the book of nature is undoubtedly the word of God*, he asserts, that "there we shall find no foundation for the scheme "of a particular providence‡." He declares indeed, "that he "will not be so uncharitable as to say, that divines mean to "blaspheme [in their doctrine of a particular providence]," yet that this he will take upon him to say, that he "who follows "them cannot avoid presumption and profaneness, and must be "much on his guard against blasphemy §."

That I may observe some order in my reflections upon this subject, I shall first offer some observations for stating the right notion of divine providence, and what we are to understand by a particular providence: and then shall proceed to shew the absurdity and ill consequences of the author's scheme: and lastly, consider the arguments he hath urged in support of it, and the objections he hath made against the doctrine of a particular providence.

By the doctrine of providence I understand the doctrine of an all-perfect mind, preserving and governing the vast universe in all its parts, presiding over all the creatures, especially rational moral agents, inspecting their conduct, and superintending and ordering the events relating to them, in the best and fittest manner, with infinite wisdom, righteousness, and equity. And such a providence cannot reasonably be denied by those, who believe that the world was originally formed by a most wise and powerful and infinitely perfect Cause and Author: for whatever reasons

* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. v. p. 420.
† Ibid. p. 546.
‡ Ibid. p. 471.
§ Ibid. p. 464.

induced

induced him to create the world, which may be juſtly ſuppoſed to have been for the communication of his goodneſs, and for the joint exerciſe and diſplay of his glorious attributes and perfections, muſt equally diſpoſe him to take care of it, and govern it, when made. Accordingly the Epicureans and others who denied a providence, did alſo deny that the world was made by God, and attributed the formation of it, not to the wiſdom, the power, and will of an intelligent cauſe, but to a wild chance, or fortuitous concourſe of atoms, or to an equally blind fatal neceſſity. And ſo far their ſcheme, however falſe and abſurd, was conſiſtent with itſelf. For they could find no effectual way to exclude God from the government of the world, which was what they wanted to get rid of, but by excluding him from the making of it too. Suppoſing one ſupreme abſolutely-perfect Cauſe and Author of all things, who made this vaſt univerſe, and all the orders of beings in it, which is what Lord Bolingbroke not only allows, but expreſsly aſſerts, it follows by the moſt evident conſequence, that the ſame infinite power, wiſdom, and goodneſs, which gave exiſtence to the world and all things in it, ſtill preſideth over the univerſal frame in all its parts. The beautiful and conſtant order which is ſtill maintained in the inanimate material ſyſtem, plainly ſheweth, that this ſtupendous frame of nature, conſiſting of ſuch an inconceivable variety of parts, is is under the conſtant ſuperintendence of a moſt wiſe and powerful preſiding mind, ever preſent to his own work. But the providence of God is eſpecially to be conſidered as exerciſed towards reaſonable creatures, moral agents, which are undoubtedly the nobleſt and moſt excellent of his creatures. The material ſyſtem, whatever order or beauty appeareth in it, is not itſelf conſcious of that beauty and order. Nor are mere ſenſitive beings capable of making proper reflections upon it, or of admiring, adoring, obeying the great Parent of the univerſe. This is the ſole privilege of rational intelligent beings. If therefore the providence of God extendeth to any of his creatures at all, we may be ſure that he exerciſeth a ſpecial care over his reaſonable creatures; and ſince he hath given them ſuch noble faculties and moral powers, will govern them in a way ſuitable to thoſe faculties and powers. And this certainly is the moſt admirable part of the divine adminiſtration in the government of the univerſe. For to govern

numberleſs myriads of active intelligent beings, in their ſeveral orders and degrees, each of whom have a will and choice of their own, and a power of determining their own actions; to exerciſe a conſtant ſuperintendency over them, and to order the events relating to them, and to diſpenſe to them proper retributions, not only according to their outward actions, but the inward diſpoſitions and principles from which thoſe actions flow; I ſay, thus to govern them, without infringing the liberty which belongeth to them as moral agents, muſt needs argue a wiſdom as well as power that exceedeth our comprehenſion. Yet who will undertake to prove that this is impoſſible, or even difficult, to an infinite, all-comprehending mind? We may reaſonably conceive that that immenſe Being, whoſe eſſence poſſeſſeth every part of this vaſt univerſe, is preſent to every individual of the human race. And if that moſt wiſe, holy, and abſolutely-perfect Being, the Great Governor of the world, be always preſent to every individual of the human race, then every individual, and all their particular actions, caſes, and circumſtances, muſt be under his providential inſpection and ſuperintendency. And as he knoweth all theſe things when they actually happen, ſo he, to whom, by our author's own acknowledgment, future things are as if they were preſent, ſaw them before they came to paſs. And therefore it was not difficult for him to form ſuch a comprehenſive ſcheme of things in his infinite mind, as ſhould extend to all their particular caſes, and the events relating to them, in a manner perfectly conſiſtent with the exerciſe of their reaſonable moral powers, and the uſe of their own endeavours.

And now it appears what is to be underſtood by the doctrine of a particular providence. It ſignifies, that Providence extends its care to the particulars or individuals of the human race, which is what this writer denies: that God exerciſeth a continual inſpection over them, and knoweth and obſerveth both the good and evil actions they perform, and even the moſt ſecret affections and diſpoſitions of their hearts: that he obſerveth them not merely as an unconcerned ſpectator, who is perfectly indifferent about them, but as the ſupreme ruler and judge, ſo as to govern them with infinite wiſdom, in a way conſiſtent with their moral agency, and to reward or puniſh them in the propereſt manner, and in the fitteſt ſeaſon. And as all their actions, ſo the events

which

which befal them, are under his ſupreme direction and ſuperintendency. Particular events are, in the ordinary courſe of things, ordered in ſuch a manner, as is ſubordinate to the general laws of providence relating to the phyſical and moral world. And what are uſually called occaſional interpoſitions, are properly to be conſidered as applications of general laws to particular caſes and occaſions. They make a part of the univerſal plan of providence, and are appointed and provided for in it, as having been perfectly foreſeen from the beginning, and originally intended in the government of reaſonable beings.

The doctrine of a particular providence taken in this view is of vaſt conſequence, and, if duly conſidered and believed, could ſcarce fail to have a happy influence over our whole temper and deportment. How ſolicitous, how earneſtly deſirous ſhould this make us to approve ourſelves to our ſupreme governor and judge, and to walk always as in his ſight! What an animating conſideration is it, when we ſet about the performance of a good action, to be aſſured, that God in his holy providence obſerveth the good deed in every circumſtance, and is ready to aſſiſt and ſupport us in it, and moſt certainly will not ſuffer it to paſs unrewarded! On the other hand, what an effectual reſtraint would it be to wicked actions, if we had this thought ſtrongly impreſſed upon our minds, that they are all perfectly known in every circumſtance to the moſt wiſe and righteous governor of the world; and that if he ſhould not at preſent follow them with immediate puniſhment, yet the time is coming, when he will call us to a ſtrict account for them! Finally, a firm belief of a particular providence, as moſt wiſely ordering and diſpoſing the events relating to particular perſons, is a ſource of ſatisfaction and comfort amidſt all the uncertainties and fluctuations of this preſent world. No conſideration is ſo well fitted to produce a cheerful reſignation, and an inward ſolid peace and joy of heart, as this: that all things, all particular caſes and circumſtances, are under the direction and government of the moſt perfect wiſdom, righteouſneſs, and goodneſs; and that nothing can befal us without the direction or permiſſion of the ſupreme diſpoſer.

Nothing therefore could be worſe founded than the boaſts of the Epicureans, who expected to be applauded as friends and benefactors to mankind, on the account of their endeavours to

deliver them from the apprehenſions of a providence. This might indeed be ſome relief to very bad men, and tend to make them eaſy in their ſins; but it was an attempt to rob good men of that which is the chief ſupport and comfort of their lives, and the moſt powerful encouragement to the ſteady uniform practice of piety and virtue. Lord Bolingbroke therefore was very ill employed, when he uſed his utmoſt efforts to deſtroy the doctrine of providence, as extending its care and inſpection to individuals; ſince without this, the acknowledgment of what he calls a general providence would be of no great advantage, and would be, with regard to all the purpoſes of religion, little better than to deny that there is a providence at all.

This leads me to what I propoſed to ſhew in the next place, *viz.* the abſurdity and the ill conſequences of the ſcheme his Lordſhip hath advanced.

It is an abſurd and inconſiſtent ſcheme. He pretends to allow, that God's providence extends to nations and large communities, that it regards men collectively, but not individually. But it is hard to conceive how a proper care could be taken of collective bodies, if the individuals of which they were compoſed were abſolutely neglected, and no regard had to them at all. A human government, that would have no regard to the caſes of particular perſons, to do them right or ſecure them from wrong, could ſcarce be accounted a government. Beſides it may be aſked what his Lordſhip means by collective bodies. There was a time when men had not yet formed themſelves into political ſocieties: muſt it be ſaid that they were then not the objects of providence at all? Or, will it be allowed that providence extended its care to them whilſt they were only in families? And how could families, either larger or ſmaller, be taken care of, if the individuals, of which families conſiſt, were neglected? And when ſeveral families united together, and formed larger communities, muſt it be ſaid, that providence quitted its care of the families to which it had extended before, and confined its inſpection to thoſe larger communities? And then it might be enquired, how large muſt a community be, in order to its being the proper object of divine providence? Does providence take notice of ſingle cities, or ſmaller republics, or only of thoſe communities which are become ſo numerous as to be united into large nations

or

or empires? It may be farther aſked, in what ſenſe is it to be underſtood, that providence extends its care to collective bodies? All that he underſtands by it ſeems to be this: that "the courſe "of things has been always the ſame; that national virtue and na-"tional vice have always produced national happineſs or miſery "in a due proportion, and are by conſequence the great ſanctions "of the law of nature*." The appointing this general conſtitution then ſeems to be all the concern that he allows to divine providence with regard to large communities or collective bodies: and the only ſanctions he allows of the law of nature (as I ſhall have occaſion more diſtinctly to ſhew, when I come to conſider the account he gives of that law) are the public happineſs or miſeries of large ſocieties or nations; and theſe are often ſome ages in operating. It frequently happens, that nations and large communities continue for a conſiderable time in great outward proſperity, when there is little national virtue remaining. And our author himſelf acknowledges, that the motives drawn from the effects of virtue and vice on collective bodies, are "ſuch as "particular perſons will be apt to think do not concern them, "becauſe they conſider themſelves as individuals, and catch at "pleaſure rather than happineſs †." And as nations are made up of families and ſmaller ſocieties, if theſe be not well conſtituted, as they cannot be where there is no ſenſe of religion, no fear of God, or regard to a providence as extending to individuals, there cannot be much national order or virtue.

Lord Bolingbroke would, in my opinion, have been more conſiſtent with himſelf, if he had abſolutely denied that providence hath any regard to mankind at all, than to pretend that it extends to collective bodies, but not to individuals: for the ſame arguments, which prove a providence as extending to mankind in general, do alſo, if rightly conſidered, prove that it is exerciſed towards particular perſons, and extendeth to particular caſes and circumſtances. This writer ſets himſelf, as hath been already obſerved, with great appearance of zeal, to vindicate the goodneſs and juſtice of divine providence in its diſpenſations towards mankind, in oppoſition both to atheiſts and divines. But how the juſtice and goodneſs of providence towards mankind

* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. v. p. 472. † Ibid. vol. iv. p. 228.

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can be vindicated, if no regard be had to individuals, it is hard to ſee. He himſelf obſerves, that "juſtice requires that puniſh-"ments ſhould be meaſured out in various degrees and meaſures, "according to the various circumſtances of particular caſes, and "in proportion to them *." And again he repeats it, "that "juſtice requires that rewards and puniſhments ſhould be mea-"ſured out in every particular caſe, in proportion to the merit "and demerit of each individual †." How then can he pretend to vindicate the juſtice of providence in this preſent ſtate, when he makes it eſſential to juſtice that regard ſhould be had to the caſe of individuals, and yet affirms that providence doth not conſider men individually at all, but only collectively?

And as his ſcheme is abſurd and inconſiſtent with itſelf, ſo it is attended with the moſt pernicious conſequences, which ought to create a horror of it in every well-diſpoſed mind. If providence hath no regard to individuals, there can be no ſenſe of the divine favour for good actions, no fear of the divine diſpleaſure for evil ones; and, as will appear to be his Lordſhip's ſentiment, no future account to be apprehended. Thus every man is left to do what is right in his own eyes, without the dread of a ſupreme Governor and Judge. It is true, God hath eſtabliſhed general laws at the beginning, but he concerneth himſelf no farther. And our author will not allow that in theſe general laws, or the plan originally formed in the divine mind, God had any regard unto, or made any proviſion for, particular perſons, actions, or events. Good men therefore have no reſource in their calamities; no ground to apply to God for ſupport under them; no expectation of aſſiſtance from him, or from any other being acting under his direction, as the miniſters and inſtruments of his providence: they are deprived of the comforts ariſing from a conſciouſneſs of his ſpecial approbation and complacency, and from the proſpects of reward from him here or hereafter. Thus *hope* is excluded, which, as his Lordſhip obſerves, "above all "things ſoftens the evils of this life, and is that cordial drop "which ſweetens every bitter potion, even the laſt ‡." On the other hand, wicked men have nothing to fear from God for their evil actions. He ſays indeed, in a paſſage cited above, that

* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. v. p. 494. † Ibid. p. 495. ‡ Ibid. p. 379.

"providence

" providence has provided means to puniſh individuals, by direct-
" ing men to form ſocieties, and to eſtabliſh laws, in the execu-
" tion of which civil magiſtrates are the vicegerents of provi-
" dence:" but I do not ſee with what propriety upon his ſcheme civil magiſtrates can be ſaid to be the vicegerents of providence; for if providence doth not conſider men individually at all, how can magiſtrates, in puniſhing individuals, be regarded as the vicegerents of providence? Or if providence conſtituted them its vicegerents, and there were no ſanctions at all propoſed for particular perſons but thoſe of the civil laws, it would follow, that men may be as wicked as they will, and give as great a looſe as they pleaſe to their appetites and paſſions, provided they can manage ſo as to eſcape puniſhment from human judicatories, which a man may do, and yet be a very bad man. Human magiſtrates are often themſelves corrupt. Solomon's obſervation is certainly juſt: *I have ſeen the place of judgment, that wickedneſs was there, and the place of righteouſneſs, that iniquity was there*, Eccl. iii. 16. Very unjuſt things are often done under colour of forms of law. Or, ſuppoſe the laws good, and the magiſtrates juſt and upright, no human laws can reward or puniſh inward good or bad affections, intentions, and diſpoſitions of the heart. If therefore there were no regard to a ſupreme Governor or Judge, to the divine approbation or diſpleaſure, as extending to individuals, or to a future account, there is great reaſon to think, that mankind in general would be far more wicked and diſſolute than they are. It is his Lordſhip's obſervation, that, " amidſt " the contingencies of human affairs, the odds will always be on " the ſide of appetite—which reaſon cannot quite ſubdue in the " ſtrongeſt minds, and by which ſhe is perpetually ſubdued in " the weakeſt*." And accordingly the ableſt politicians have thought the aids of religion, which eſpecially includes a regard to providence as extending to individuals, abſolutely neceſſary for ſtrengthening the bands of civil government.

I ſhall now conſider the arguments Lord Bolingbroke hath offered in ſupport of his ſcheme, and the objections he hath advanced againſt the doctrine of a particular providence.

He frequently intimates, that the doctrine of a particular pro-

* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. v. p. 479.

vidence

vidence is needleſs; "ſince the ordinary courſe of things, pre-"ſerved and conducted by a general providence, is ſufficient to "confirm what the law of nature and reaſon teaches us*." But it appears from what hath been already obſerved, that the doctrine of a general providence, as he underſtands it, *i. e.* a providence that has no regard to individuals at all, to their actions, or to the events that befal them, is far from being ſufficient to the purpoſes of religion and virtue, or of human ſocieties: that it neither furniſheth proper comfort and ſupports for the encouragement of good men, nor is ſufficient to ſtrike terror into bad men, and to be a reſtraint to vice and wickedneſs. It hath alſo been ſhewn, that the notion of a general providence, as excluding all regard to individuals, and to their actions and concernments, cannot be ſupported, nor made to conſiſt with reaſon or with itſelf. And whereas it is repreſented as a degrading the divine Majeſty, to ſuppoſe him to concern himſelf about what relates to ſuch inconſiderable beings, as are the individuals of the human race: this objection, though varniſhed over with a pretence of conſulting God's honour, doth at the bottom argue mean and unworthy notions of him. It is in effect a judging of God by our own imperfections. Our views are narrow and limited, and cannot take in many things at once, nor attend to ſmaller matters without neglecting things of greater conſequence: but it is otherwiſe with a Being of infinite perfection, who is intimately preſent to every part of this vaſt univerſe, and knoweth and taketh care of all things at once, with the ſame eaſe as if he had only one ſingle thing to attend to. He is capable of exerciſing a moſt wiſe providential care towards all his creatures in a way ſuited to their ſeveral natures, conditions, and circumſtances: nor can the multiplicity of things occaſion the leaſt confuſion or perplexity in his all-comprehending mind.

The arguments which he urgeth againſt a particular providence, in the fifty-ſeventh of his Fragments and Eſſays, for ſeveral pages together†, proceed upon a continued miſrepreſentation of the ſenſe of thoſe whom he has thought fit to oppoſe. He there chargeth the divines as maintaining, that God ought by particular providences to interpoſe in every ſingle inſtance, for

* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. v. p. 404. † Ibid. p. 424, & ſeq.

giving

giving an immediate reward to every good action, and for punishing every evil one, even in this present state. He supposes them also to hold, that some men are necessarily determined to good actions by divine influences communicated to them, and others for want of those influences unavoidably determined to evil; and then he argues, that on such a supposition there would be no room for free choice, nor consequently for virtue or vice, merit or demerit, nor therefore justice or injustice*. He urgeth further, that if good men were constantly and remarkably distinguished by a particular providence, it would be apt to produce presumption in them, to destroy or prevent their benevolence, and consequently their goodness; and to harden the wicked†: and that even on that supposition, the providence of God could not be vindicated in the opinion of mankind, or of divines themselves, since still it would not be agreed who were good men. The Mahometans, Christians, and different sects of the latter, would insist upon it, that goodness includes a belief of their distinguishing tenets, and an attachment to their several systems of religion. "One would pass for a good man at Rome, another "at Geneva," &c.‡. But he seems not to have considered, that upon the supposition he puts, there could be no place for this objection: since if every good man and good action was to be immediately and remarkably distinguished by a particular interposition of divine providence, and every bad man and evil action to be immediately punished, there would be no room left for men's passing different judgments concerning the goodness or badness of persons or actions; for on that supposition, there would be a visible determination of heaven in favour of every good man and good action; so that no man could doubt, upon seeing any person thus remarkably favoured and distinguished, that he was really good, whatever denomination he might pass under. But the truth is, no divine ever advanced such an hypothesis as he here argueth against. By the doctrine of a particular providence, they do not mean a constant particular interposition of divine providence for rewarding every good man and virtuous action, and punishing every bad man and every wicked action, in an im-

* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. v. p. 425, 426. † Ibid. p. 428, 429.
‡ Ibid. p. 431, 432.

mediate

mediate and viſible manner here on earth: on the contrary, they univerſally maintain, that this preſent ſtate is a ſtate of trial and diſcipline; and that it would be no way agreeable to the nature of ſuch a ſtate to have all good men and good actions immediately and remarkably rewarded, and all wicked men immediately puniſhed: that the temporary ſufferings of good men, and the proſperity of the wicked, are permitted for very wiſe ends, and may be reaſonably and conſiſtently accounted for, on the ſuppoſition that this preſent life is a ſtate of trial; though they could not well be accounted for, if this were deſigned to be a ſtate of final retributions, or to be the only ſtate of exiſtence allotted us.

The greateſt part of what he offers againſt a particular providence in the ſixty-ſecond of his Fragments and Eſſays, relates to *occaſional* interpoſitions, which he pretends would be miracles if they were real. "Such," he ſays, "they would be ſtrictly, "whether they were contrary to the eſtabliſhed courſe of nature "or not; for the miracle conſiſts in the extraordinary interpoſi- "tion, as much as in the nature of the thing brought to paſs: "That the miracle would be as real in the one caſe as in the "other; and the reality might be made evident enough by the "occaſion, by the circumſtance, by the repetition of it on ſimilar "occaſions, and in ſimilar circumſtances; and, above all, by "this circumſtance, that the aſſumed particular providence was "a direct anſwer to particular prayers and acts of devotion of- "fered up to procure it†." Here he takes upon him to give a new and arbitrary definition of a miracle. Though a thing hath nothing in it contrary to the eſtabliſhed courſe of nature, yet it is to be regarded as a miracle, if there be ſuppoſed to be any ſpecial agency of the divine providence in it, ſuited to particular occaſions and circumſtances; and, above all, if it be ſuppoſed to come in anſwer to prayer. But if the occaſional interpoſitions he refers to be perfectly agreeable to the general laws of nature and of providence, and be only ſpecial applications of general laws to particular occaſions, I do not ſee how they can be properly ſaid to be miraculous at all; or how their being ſuppoſed to come in anſwer to prayer can make them ſo.

But he urgeth farther, that "if providence were directed ac-

† Bolingbroke's Works, vol. v. p. 458, 459.

"cording

"cording to the particular deſires, and even wants, of perſons "equally well qualified and intitled to the divine favour, the "whole order of nature, phyſical and moral, would be ſubverted, "the affairs of mankind would fall into the utmoſt confuſion— "and if this ſcheme were true, the world would be governed by "miracles, till miracles loſt their name*."

But all this proceeds upon a great miſtake of the point in queſtion. None of the divines that hold a particular providence, *i. e.* a providence which extendeth its care to particular perſons or individuals of the human race, maintain or ſuppoſe, that God muſt interpoſe to ſatisfy all the different deſires and prayers of men, many of which, as he obſerves, are repugnant to one another. If the prayers be of the right kind, ſuch as reaſon and religion preſcribe, they muſt be always offered up with this condition or limitation, which the Scripture expreſsly directs us to, *viz.* that we muſt deſire the things we pray for, ſo far and no farther than they are agreeable to the divine will, and to what it ſeemeth fit to God in his infinite wiſdom to appoint. Suppoſing therefore a good man doth not obtain the particular bleſſing he prays for, he may reſt ſatisfied in this, that it is what the divine wiſdom doth not ſee fit to grant; and he only deſired it under that condition. Or if he receives that particular good thing he prayed for, and regards it as an anſwer to his prayer, ſtill there is nothing miraculous in the caſe. There is nothing done in contravention to the uſual courſe of things which the divine wiſdom hath eſtabliſhed. It may juſtly be ſuppoſed to be a law of the moral world, that it is proper for us, in teſtimony of our dependence upon God, and in acknowledgment of his providence, to apply to him by prayer for the bleſſings we ſtand in need of: and that prayer ſo qualified as God requireth, proceeding from an honeſt and upright heart, and from good affections and intentions, and accompanied with the uſe of proper endeavours on our parts, is among the means appointed by divine wiſdom for obtaining the moſt valuable benefits, eſpecially thoſe of a ſpiritual nature. And the bleſſings thus communicated may be juſtly ſaid to be communicated, not in a miraculous way, but in a way that is perfectly agreeable to the general laws of providence, and the order

* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. v. p. 460.

which

which the divine wiſdom hath appointed. Any one that conſiders this will eaſily ſee how little what our author has here offered is to the purpoſe; and yet he goes on to declaim after his manner, that particular providence puts a force on the mechanical laws of nature, and on the freedom of the will, in a multitude of inſtances; and that thoſe who maintain this doctrine ſuppoſe, that the laws of gravitation muſt be ſometimes ſuſpended, ſometimes precipitated, in compliance with men's deſires, and the tottering edifice muſt be kept miraculouſly from falling*.

Among the extraordinary interpoſitions of divine providence, he reckons "the metaphyſical or phyſical influence of ſpirits, "ſuggeſtions, ſilent communications, injections of ideas. Theſe "things," he declares, "he cannot comprehend; and he com-"pares them to the altering or ſuſpending the courſe of the ſun, "or revolutions of the earth, in the phyſical ſyſtem. And that "all ſuch interpoſitions in the intellectual ſyſtem, as ſhould give "thoughts and new diſpoſitions to the minds of men, cannot be "conceived without altering in every ſuch inſtance the natural "progreſſion of the human underſtanding, and that freedom of "the will which every man is conſcious that he has†." Our author has here let us know what he thinks of all revelations, inſpirations, or communications from God the Supreme Spirit, or from ſubordinate created ſpirits, to the human mind; that he regards them as inconſiſtent with the *laws of the intellectual ſyſtem*, and the *natural progreſſion of the human underſtanding*, or eſſential *freedom of the will*. But whence could he know enough of the laws of the intellectual ſyſtem, to be able to pronounce that this is inconſiſtent with thoſe laws? That one man may ſuggeſt or communicate thoughts and ideas to another by words and language, and that there is nothing in this contrary to the nature and order of the underſtanding, or freedom of the will, is univerſally acknowledged: and why then ſhould it be thought inconſiſtent with theſe, for God himſelf, or ſpiritual beings ſuperior to man, to communicate thoughts or ideas to the human mind? The moſt natural way of working upon men as reaſonable creatures, and of influencing their actions in a way agreeable to the juſt order of their faculties, is by ſuggeſting proper

* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. v. p. 460. † Ibid. p. 414, 415.

thoughts

thoughts or ideas to their minds, and our not being able particularly to explain how this is done, is no juſt objection againſt it. This writer himſelf elſewhere, ſpeaking of *that extraordinary action of God upon the mind which the word Inſpiration is now uſed to denote*, expreſsly acknowledges, that "it is no more incomprehenſible than the ordinary action of mind on body, or "body on mind*." And indeed it cannot without the higheſt abſurdity be denied, that God can work upon the ſpirits of men by an immediate influence, and yet in ſuch a way as is perfectly agreeable to their rational natures, and which may not put any conſtraint upon the freedom of their wills. And many caſes may be ſuppoſed, in which his doing ſo may anſwer valuable ends. It may alſo be eaſily conceived, that he can make impreſſions upon men's minds by various other means, which he may make uſe of in his wiſe and ſovereign providence to this purpoſe, without at all infringing the order of things in the natural or moral world.

He farther argues, that to ſuppoſe a providence extending to individuals, and particular occaſional interpoſitions, "is to ſuppoſe that there are as many providences as there are men:" or, as he elſewhere expreſſeth it, that "common providence "would break into a multitude of particular providences for "the ſupply of wants, and grant of petitions†." But there is no real foundation for this pretence. There is one univerſal providence, which may be conſidered as extending to particular perſons and caſes, all of which are perfectly known to God, and (as was before hinted) occaſion no confuſion or diſtraction in his infinite mind. Our author indeed declares, that "they "who have attempted to ſhew that God may act by particular "and occaſional interpoſitions, conſiſtently with the preſervation of the general order, appear to him quite unintelligible‡." If it were ſo, our not being able diſtinctly to ſhew how particular occaſional interpoſitions may conſiſt with the doctrine of a general providence, would be no argument at all againſt it: ſince, as he himſelf obſerves upon another occaſion, "It is impertinent "to deny the exiſtence of any phænomenon, merely becauſe we

* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. iii. p. 468. † Ibid. p. 420.
‡ Ibid. p. 414.

" cannot account for it *." And yet we may eaſily conceive in general, that they are perfectly reconcileable; ſince, as hath been already hinted, theſe occaſional interpoſitions are uſually no more than the applications of the general laws of providence to particular caſes and circumſtances. That there may be, or that there have been, ſuch interpoſitions, he does not pretend abſolutely to deny: but, he ſays, that " we have no foundation for them in " our own experience, or in any hiſtory except that of the bible †." And yet ſoon after obſerves, that " every religion boaſts of ma- " ny inſtances, wherein the divine providence has been thus ex- " erciſed ‡." And certain it is, that this hath been the general ſentiment of mankind. Beſides the ordinary courſe of things, which is to be regarded as under the conſtant care and direction of a ſovereign providence, there have been events of a remarkable and uncommon nature, though not properly miraculous, of which there are accounts in the moſt authentic hiſtories, and in which men have been apt to acknowledge a ſpecial interpoſition of divine providence. The moſt important events have been brought about by the ſeemingly ſmalleſt and moſt unlikely means. Things have been often ſtrangely conducted through many intricate turns to produce events contrary to all human expectation. Actions have been over-ruled to effects and iſſues quite oppoſite to the intentions of the actors. The moſt artful ſchemes of human policy have been ſtrangely baffled and diſappointed. Surpriſing changes have been wrought upon the ſpirits of men, and reſtraints laid upon their paſſions, in a manner that can ſcarce be accounted for, and upon which great events have depended. Such things have naturally led mankind to acknowledge a divine hand, and a providence, over-ruling human affairs. I am ſenſible many of thoſe who honour themſelves with the title of free-thinkers will be apt to aſcribe this to ſuperſtition or enthuſiaſm. But what right have they to pronounce againſt the general ſentiments of mankind, and which ſeem to have ariſen from the obſervation of events which argue the over-ruling interpoſition of a ſuperior inviſible agency?

He obſerves with a ſneer, that " there is many an old woman

* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. iii. p. 468. † Ibid. vol. v. p. 414.
‡ Ibid. p. 413.

" who

" who is ready to relate, with much ſpiritual pride, the particular " providences that attended her and hers*." As to the charge of ſpiritual pride, it is no more than he hath advanced againſt all that believe a particular providence, intereſting itſelf in the affairs of men; the belief of which he imputeth to *high notions of human importance.* That he himſelf had high notions of his own ſagacity cannot be doubted; but the ſentiments he is pleaſed to aſcribe to the old woman, ſeem to me to be more reaſonable, and would, if generally entertained, have a much better influence on mankind than his own. Is it not much better, and more agreeable to reaſon and nature, for dependent creatures to regard the benefits they receive, and the good events which befall them, as owing to the interpoſition of a moſt wiſe and benign providence, and to acknowledge with thankfulneſs the condeſcending care and goodneſs of God, in ſuch inſtances; than to paſs them over with a regardleſs eye, from an apprehenſion that God doth not concern himſelf with the affairs of men; that he is utterly unmindful of individuals, and taketh no notice of their actions, or of the events that relate to them? And this is the goodly ſcheme which this author hath taken ſo much pains to eſtabliſh.

But he urgeth, that it is of no uſe to acknowledge particular interpoſitions of divine providence, ſince they cannot be diſtinguiſhed from events that happen in the courſe of God's general providence. " The effects," ſaith he, " that are aſſumed of par- " ticular providences, are either falſe, or undiſtinguiſhable from " thoſe of a general providence, and become particular by no- " thing more than the application which vain ſuperſtition or " pious fraud makes of them†." And he obſerves, that this holds with reſpect to the caſe not only of particular perſons, but of collective bodies. " Their circumſtances are ſo nearly alike, " and they return ſo often to be equally objects of theſe ſuppoſed " providences, that no man will dare to determine where theſe " providences have been, or ſhould have been employed, and " where not‡." It appears then, that though he ſometimes ſeems to acknowledge the care of divine providence as extending to collective bodies, though not to individuals, yet in reality

* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. v. p. 418. † Ib. p. 420. See alſo p. 450.
‡ Ibid. p. 460.

he does not admit that providence interpoſes with regard to the one more than the other; or that in either caſe we can juſtly aſcribe any of the events that befall men, whether individually or collectively conſidered, to divine providence; ſince we cannot diſcern or diſtinguiſh in what events providence has been employed, and in what not. But the truth is, we need not be put to the difficulty of thus diſtinguiſhing, if we believe that providence is really concerned in them all. It over-ruleth both the affairs and events relating to nations and to particular perſons, diſpoſing and governing them in the fitteſt matter, according to what ſeemeth moſt fit to his infinite wiſdom, to which all circumſtances are perfectly known. And even where the events ſeem contrary, proſperous to one nation or particular perſon, adverſe to another, providence is to be regarded in both. For we can never err in judging that all events whatſoever are under the wiſe direction and ſuperintendency of a ſovereign providence, though, when we undertake to aſſign the particular reaſons of God's providential diſpenſations, we may eaſily be miſtaken.

Our author farther objecteth againſt the doctrine of a particular providence, that it ſuppoſes all mankind to be under an univerſal theocracy like the Jewiſh; and he obſerves, that even in that caſe it would not have the effect to engage men to virtue, or deter them from vice and wickedneſs, any more than it did the Jews*. But he here confoundeth things that are of diſtinct conſideration. The heathens, and all mankind in all ages, have been under the care and ſuperintendency of divine providence, and even of a particular providence, in the ſenſe in which we are now conſidering it; *i. e.* a providence, which extendeth to the individuals of the human race, inſpecting their actions, and diſpoſing and governing the events relating to them. But they were not under the Jewiſh theocracy, which was a peculiar conſtitution, eſtabliſhed for very wiſe purpoſes, the reaſons and ends of which I ſhall afterwards have occaſion more particularly to conſider. At preſent I ſhall only obſerve, that though under that conſtitution we may juſtly ſuppoſe there were extraordinary interpoſitions in a way of mercy and judgment, both national, and relating to particular perſons, more frequently than there

* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. v. p. 439.

would

would have been under another conſtitution; yet the deſign of it was not, as our author ſuppoſes, that providence ſhould interpoſe for giving a preſent immediate reward to every good man, and every good action, and for immediately puniſhing every bad one. We find frequent pathetical complaints even under that diſpenſation, of the calamities and ſufferings of good men, and the proſperity of the wicked. This gave occaſion to the 37th and 73d Pſalms. See alſo Plaſm xvii. 14. Jer. xii. 1, 2. The proper ultimate reward of good men, and puniſhment of the wicked, was ſtill reſerved for a future ſtate of retributions, which, though not expreſsly mentioned in their law, was believed and expected; as appeareth from what Solomon hath ſaid concerning it, Eccleſ. iii. 16, 17. xii. 14.

I ſhall conclude this letter with taking notice of an obſervation of our author, which is deſigned to take off the force of an argument that Mr. Wollaſton had offered. "It will be of little ſervice," ſaith he, "to the ſcheme of particular providences, to "ſay, like Wollaſton, that there may be incorporeal, or at leaſt "inviſible beings, of intellect and powers ſuperior to man, and "capable of mighty things: and that theſe beings may be the "miniſters of God, and the authors of thoſe providences." He pretends, that there is no proof that there are ſuch beings; and ridicules the doctrine of Genii or Dæmons, as having been "owing to ancient aſtrologers, and the knaves or madmen that "profeſſed theurgic magic." And he argues, that "if theſe "angels act by the immediate command of God, it is in oppoſi"tion to his general providence, and to ſupply the defects of "it; and that it is to give up the government over mankind to "thoſe beings*." But it is with an ill grace that this writer ſeems here to queſtion the exiſtence of angels, when yet he frequently intimates, that there are many orders of beings much ſuperior to man, and that man is of the loweſt order of intellectual beings. He repreſents it as a thing highly probable, that "there is a gradation from man, through various forms of ſenſe, "intelligence, and reaſon, up to beings unknown to us, whoſe "rank in the intellectual world is even above our conception†." And that "there may be as much difference between ſome other

* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. v. p. 463, 464. † Ibid. p. 329, 330.

"creatures

"creatures of God and man, as there is between man and an "oyſter*." And if it be allowed, that there are created intelligences much ſuperior to man, where is the abſurdity of ſuppoſing that they are employed by divine wiſdom as the inſtruments and agents of providence in its adminiſtrations towards the human race? Higher orders of creatures may, in the original plan of providence, be deſigned to aſſiſt, and exerciſe ſome ſuperintendency over the lower. It may reaſonably be conceived, that this may contribute to promote the beauty and order of the univerſe, and to connect the different orders of beings, and to carry on a proper intercourſe between them. It is certain, that the exiſtence, and the interpoſition of ſuch beings on ſpecial occaſions, have been generally believed by mankind in all ages. And it is clearly determined in the revelation contained in the holy Scripture: ſo that it may be now aſſumed not merely as a reaſonable hypotheſis, but as a truth that can be depended upon. Nor does the making uſe of angels as agents or inſtruments in the adminiſtrations of providence argue any *defect* of providence, as he is pleaſed to inſinuate, which ſtill overſees and directs the whole. For when God makes uſe of inſtruments in the courſe of his providence, it is not becauſe, like human governors, he is unable to do it immediately by himſelf, and cannot be perſonally preſent: for he is ſtill preſent to every part of the creation; and all things are under his direction and ſuperintendency. But he is pleaſed to make uſe of ſome of his creatures as inſtruments in conferring benefits, or inflicting chaſtiſements upon others, for the better carrying on the order and œconomy of his kingdom, and for many wiſe ends which we cannot pretend at preſent diſtinctly to aſſign.

In my next I ſhall conſider what Lord Bolingbroke hath offered concerning the immortality of the ſoul, and a future ſtate of retributions, which will let us farther into the true intention of his ſcheme.

I am, &c.

* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. iv. p. 177

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